Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture

Bruce V. Foltz

Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy

Contesting the Boundaries of Nature, Art, and Religion

Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture

Volume 26

Series Founder
H. Tristram Engelhardt†, Jr., Department of Philosophy, Rice University, and Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas

Editor
Mark J. Cherry, Department of Philosophy, St. Edward's University, Austin, Texas

Assistant Editor
James Stacey Taylor, The College of New Jersey, Ewing, USA

Editorial Board
David Bradshaw, Department of Philosophy, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky
Peter Jaworski, McDonough School of Business, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
Terry Pinkard, Department of Philosophy, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
C. Griffin Trotter, Center for Health Care Ethics & Emergency Medicine, Saint Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri
Kevin Wm. Wildes, S.J., President, Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana

More information about this series at http://www.springer.com/series/6446

Bruce V. Foltz

Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy

Contesting the Boundaries of Nature, Art, and Religion

Bruce V. Foltz
Department of Philosophy
Eckerd College
Saint Petersburg, Florida, USA

ISSN 0928-9518 ISSN 2215-1753 (electronic)
Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture
ISBN 978-3-319-96672-4 ISBN 978-3-319-96673-1 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Preface to *Byzantine Incursions* by Bruce Foltz

It is remarkable how little attention philosophers have paid to Byzantium. To a greater extent than the Latin-speaking West, where a tiny flame of learning was kept alive in monasteries, Byzantium inherited the full panoply of ancient philosophical culture. Although long-standing stereotypes would tell us that the Byzantines did little with this inheritance, recent research is increasingly revealing the depth and originality of prominent Byzantine thinkers such as Maximus the Confessor, John Damascene, and Gregory Palamas. Just as importantly, these thinkers were not splendid comets lighting up the night sky, but spokesmen of a comprehensive *Weltanschauung* that also found expression in Byzantine art, architecture, hymnody, and legal and political life. Unlike modern philosophers, who necessarily speak as advocates of one particular view among others, Byzantine thinkers spoke from within the common understanding of God and the cosmos that was shared throughout the Eastern Christian world. It was this rich but unified Eastern Christian civilization that was the true successor of the ancient Roman Empire and the early Christian church. In encountering it, we do not enter upon some exotic by-way, but upon a journey into the most comprehensive and fully developed expression of our own heritage.

A volume of *Byzantine Incursions* written by a philosopher is therefore much to be welcomed. I hasten to add, however, that the focus of the present volume is not primarily historical. Although the author has a deep knowledge of the history of both philosophy and of Eastern Christianity, he writes as a thinker concerned with the issues and challenges of our own times. Perhaps most of all, he is concerned with the possibility of finding truth and beauty in an increasingly technological age. A brief review of what he tells us of his life story will help to clarify his distinctive concerns.

As he explains in Chapter Five, his own journey to Byzantium began with his youthful experiences of the beauty of nature, including some that verged upon the mystical. After several years spent in Zen Buddhism, he found in the philosophy of Heidegger an explanation of how the depth of meaning that he recognized in nature has come to be marginalized within modern thought. He also found (or thought he found) the possibility of entering into a truer relationship with Being (*das Sein*).

Although he does not mention it here, it was during these years that Professor Foltz produced a distinguished volume on Heidegger's philosophy of nature and served as founder and first president of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy.

Eventually, through reading Heideggerian interpretations of Christianity, he came to embrace a symbolic and demythologized form of Christian belief. Christian practice, however, has a way of moving the soul even when there is no intent that it should do so. Eventually, seeking a deeper sense of true worship, he decided to visit a local Orthodox parish. There he encountered the transcendent beauty of the Divine Liturgy. As he recalls, "I don't know what I had been expecting. But not this, to be so completely swept away, taken up into I knew not what." Here was a form of *praxis* that offered what Heidegger had only theorized about, an encounter with true Being, known now to be not just a What, but a Who. The Divine Liturgy is perhaps the central cultural legacy of Byzantium, although it of course cannot be separated from the rest of Orthodox theological and liturgical tradition. It was from within Orthodoxy that Professor Foltz began to recover the riches of Byzantium and to see how powerfully they answer to the deepest needs of modern life.

This brief account may make our author's work seem more programmatic than it actually is, and if so I do him a disservice. The reader will find here many fascinating excursions into topics one would not ordinarily link together. They range from the difference between art that is religious and that which is sacred, to the true demands of *agape*, to the paradoxes of the mathematics of infinity, to the centrality of imagination in university education. Among the author's favorite interlocutors are not only Byzantine thinkers such as Maximus and Palamas and philosophers such as Plato, Heidegger, and Nietzsche, but the novelist Dostoevsky, the poet Blake, the great iconographer Rublev, and the little known Russian polymath, Pavel Florensky. Amidst this intellectual bounty, one always finds a mind that is fully awake, intent on answering questions that most of us have scarcely even considered, much less asked with such intensity. Even those who may disagree with the author's conclusions can scarcely come away without being moved to look at things in a new way and to begin asking new questions.

For my own part, I like to think that I have learned much from these essays, including how much I have yet to learn. It is with pleasure that I join the author in offering them to the world. May they help lead many into the riches of Byzantium.

David Bradshaw

Professor of Philosophy
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY, USA

Introduction: Why Byzantium?

> And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
> To the holy city of Byzantium.
> O sages standing in God's holy fire
> As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
> Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
> And be the singing-masters of my soul.
> William Butler Yeats

I

This is a transitive book, a book of transitions, perhaps a book of translations as well, or better yet transpositions. Its rather odd-sounding title, *Byzantine Incursions*, suggests some of the borders that it attempts to breach, several of the boundaries it seeks to infringe.

Most obviously, these chapters represent a series of incursions from the region of Byzantine thought into territory long claimed by Western philosophy and theology. But at the same time, they exhibit a more subtle (and often exploratory) project of attempting, beginning with thoughts and questions inevitably rooted in the West, to penetrate as deeply as possible into the Byzantine philosophical and spiritual landscape—and thus into terrain that is, as it should and must be, uniquely resistant to that incursion. At the same time, this book, in proceeding from West to East, hopes to more resemble the seeking of Yeats (or, better yet, the pilgrim Egeria) than the hostile incursion of the Fourth Crusade, which sought not comprehension but only plunder. And hopefully, too, the Byzantium with which I concern myself is not the imaginary city of golden dreams fashioned by the poet's yearning, but rather the heavenly city that the Byzantines sought to bring down to earth, the city of Uncreated Light infusing the visible, and which they have always chosen to present in leaves of gold upon their icons.

At the same time, however, these are also incursions and sometimes raids back and forth between the visible and the invisible: first of all between the natural world

and the divine energies with which Byzantine thought has always found the former to be infused and saturated and—to those with eyes to see, that is, to "the pure of heart"—glorified. Between experienced realities and the *logoi* or inner depths that sustain them and grant them beauty and significance and ontological weight. Creator and creation, transcendence and immanence, and visible and invisible have too long in the West been divorced and isolated from one another, resulting in a metaphysical devastation and devaluation through which the former has been rendered an abstraction and vapor and the latter a nihilistic wasteland, desolate of life or goodness or beauty—in Nietzsche's prescient terms, an earth unchained from its sun and increasingly hurtling into the icy abysses of trackless space.

I am philosophically convinced that the severing of transcendence and immanence which everywhere afflicts us today cries out for healing, even as the urgency of this therapeutic task comes to the foreground in many areas of Western culture. But it is an open question whether this must entail forcing the fading ghost of transcendence into purely immanent enclosures, as in the reductionist hermeneutics of Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Deleuze, or whether it will look instead toward a transfiguration of earth and humanity with the light of a rediscovered holiness. The latter was the perennial project of Byzantine culture, just as much in its Slavic and Arabic manifestations as in its Greek inception, whose signature instantiation was the Great Church, the Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, with its dome mirroring the liturgical drama for which it was built: to bring heaven down to earth, even as it elevated and transfigured the earthly—a striking contrast to the Gothic spires of the Latin West which, a thousand years later, pointed implacably away from earth toward a heaven en route to which we must climb upon innumerable rationalistic rungs—and as Kierkegaard saw, our steps will always be too few—or else try to catapult ourselves into the heavenly ether with the aid of faith, which came to be understood by the Reformers not as trust in lived epiphanies but as an exercise in willed belief.

With regard to human aspirations and prospects, the incursions seek above all that most remarkable Byzantine breakthrough of *theosis*—i.e., that impossible infusion of humanity with divine energies that is so thoroughgoing as to constitute a divinization, a becoming-divine through grace. And this is how it is summed up by the Byzantine-Russian thinker Dostoevsky—that great Eastern counterweight (and fellow diagnostician of nihilism) to Nietzsche—who foresaw the decisive choice for humanity as one between the reign of the man-god, of humanity usurping the role of the Creator with the most disastrous consequences, and the God-man, of humanity united with the God who has Himself come to be united with us.

Why Byzantium? Because I believe that the perennial problem of the relation between transcendence and immanence has found its most fully satisfactory answer in the philosophical and theological legacy of Byzantine thought, which has always sought to bring together strands tenaciously held separate in the West, and indeed that at its heart *is and always has been* precisely that transitive movement. For this reason, these chapters may well seem like incursions of theology into philosophy and at other times incursions of philosophical thought past the boundaries proper to it and into the territory of theology. *De jure*, asks the Kantian magistrate: by what

right this disregard of passports and papers and proper ports of entry? But the answer lies in the very proximity of God to the world. "The Eastern tradition," argues Vladimir Lossky, one of Russia's finest modern thinkers, "knows nothing of 'pure nature' to which grace is added as a supernatural gift. For it, there is no [purely] natural or 'normal' state…. 'Pure nature,' for Eastern theology, would thus be a philosophical fiction…"[1] That is, there can be no purely "natural theology" from this perspective, or rather, such a project would of necessity be an adventure in distortion. The rigid distinction between reason and revelation, if it is to be more than just a matter of relative emphasis, is alien to Byzantine thought. God is always already with us.

Already in the fourth century, the beginnings of this Byzantine permeation of life and thought with spiritual matters were wryly noted by St. Gregory of Nyssa. Depicting everyday life in ancient Constantinople, he remarks "Every place in the city, the narrow streets, the markets, the squares…. If you ask any of them about money, they will always produce philosophical discourse about the generate and the ingenerate *[peri gennetou kai agennetou];* if you seek to learn the price of bread, you will get the [heretical] statement, 'the Father is greater, and the Son subordinate.' If, again, you were to say that the bathing apparatus is comfortable, you would be [just as heretically] instructed that the Son is out of nothing *[ek ouk onton]."* The Greek historian of Byzantine philosophy, Basil Tatakis, concludes that however whimsical Gregory's prose may be here, "yet this attachment, this total dedication of the soul to high spiritual objects, which becomes the object of Gregory of Nyssa's satire because of its heterodox deviation, constitutes the secure key for the understanding of Byzantine civilization…. This is finally what gives the wonderful unity which Byzantine civilization presents."[2]

But perhaps, too, the incursions in this book might also seem Byzantine in the pejorative sense we have inherited from Enlightenment despisers of Byzantium, such as Edward Gibbon: needlessly complicated and oddly convoluted—strangely antiquated when viewed from within the streamlined, functionalistic intellectual landscape of both modern and, unwittingly, postmodern rationalities—anathema equally to the Age of Progress and our own Age of Irony. But here the "Byzantine" rubric is less appropriate and, indeed, I believe deeply misleading. For even though its conceptual elaboration, employing the discursive tools of language and reason, will surely end up (perhaps even of necessity) seeming arcane and complex, as generating juxtapositions that are far from neatly categorical, what this effort seeks to reach is itself sublimely simple and perfectly elegant, refracting light confusingly in disparate directions only when the arguments and concepts and illumined objects are themselves clung to with the death grip of a swimmer who has lost his nerve over deep waters. Tatakis, writing elsewhere, notes an antinomy at the heart of Byzantine philosophy:

---

[1] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976) p. 101.

[2] Basil Tatakis, *Christian Philosophy in the Patristic and Byzantine Tradition*, trans. G. Dragas, (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute) 2007, p. 72.

> The Byzantines were totally committed to Christian mysticism [resulting in] the following antinomy: on the one hand, the constant effort to express theological thought in a purely logically abstract form, a goal which would secure the affirmation of logic; yet on the other hand, faith in God, who transcends human reasoning, who is elusive and incomprehensible. Logical form strives to encompass an essence that is by definition elusive.[3]

That is to say, the Byzantine thought that I have sought to appropriate during the last two decades is at its heart *apophatic*, ultimately committed to using words and concepts somewhat as the early Wittgenstein urged with his ladder analogy—as instruments of ascent to be kicked away, once the work has been done. For that sublime simplicity—for the sake of which all the odd juxtapositions of one philosophical approach alongside another, one genre alongside another, and one conceptual framework after another are undertaken in this book—has already been captured gently and elegantly in a single Hebrew word: *Immanuel*, God with us. It is this center, around which all Byzantine philosophy and theology, along with its art and holy hymns, its liturgies, and its symbolism, revolve—a movement that the essays in this book seek to emulate, however clumsily and feebly the movement, however weak the transitions, and however distant visible and invisible remain from one another. For surely it is most of all the movement itself—a movement both of thought and of spirit—that needs to be undertaken and sustained.

[3] Basil Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, tr. Nicholas Moutafakis (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co. Inc.) 2003, p. 7.

Contents

Part I From Creation to Creator

Chapter One Strange Beauty: Environmental Aesthetics After Humanism 3

Chapter Two Hidden Patency: On the Iconic Character of Human Life 15

Chapter Three The Challenge of Secularism to Philosophical Ethics. . . 27

Chapter Four Reflections on Faith and Science 31

Part II Nature and the Holy

Chapter Five Toward the Mystery: Becoming an Orthodox Philosopher 41

Chapter Six Saving Sophia: Notes Toward an Orthodox Philosophy of Nature 59

Chapter Seven Nature and Divine Wisdom: How (Not) to Speak of Sophia. 73

Chapter Eight Discerning the Spirit in Creation: Orthodox Christianity and Environmental Science 91

Chapter Nine The Truth of Nature: Environmental Theology and the Epistemology of Asceticism 105

Part III Byzantine Essays

Chapter Ten "As We Also Forgive:" Asceticism and Forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer, According to St. Maximus the Confessor 119

Chapter Eleven Being as Communion: On the Ontology of Love in the Byzantine Tradition 129

Chapter Twelve ***Tō Heteron*: The Problem of Otherness in Western Philosophy and Christian Theology** 143

Chapter Thirteen The Prayer of the Heart, and the Heart of Prayer: On the Eastern Orthodox Practice of Prayer 153

Part IV Byzantine Thought and Modern Culture

Chapter Fourteen Icon and Idol: Representation of the Divine in the Byzantine East 167

Chapter Fifteen Heresy and Iconography: Notes on Carolingian Aesthetics and Its Western Successors 175

Chapter Sixteen From Fichte to Florensky: The Transformation of German Idealism Within Russian Philosophy 195

Chapter Seventeen The Fluttering of Autumn Leaves: Logic, Mathematics, and Metaphysics in Florensky's "The Pillar and Ground of the Truth" 213

Part V Higher Education and Western Culture

Chapter Eighteen One-Dimensional Learning: The Dialectic of Sacred and Secular as the Enduring Possibility of the University 237

Chapter Nineteen Approaches to Teaching a Great Books Core at an Orthodox College 261

Index 267

Part I
From Creation to Creator

These first chapters constitute preliminary explorations, border skirmishes within contested territories, rather than full-fledged incursions. Sometimes here Byzantium is evoked only indirectly or implicitly. Beginning with the natural, how does transcendence come into view—not just the thought of transcendence, but an encounter with the transcendent itself, which must by definition always possess a character of absolute otherness? And how can that Other enter into the Same of the world, without being reduced to its dimensions? The first chapter merely works its way toward the Byzantine intellectual landscape through a reflection on the experience of natural beauty and its strangeness or otherness, something only partly captured by the Kantian notion of the sublime, for it leads to an experience of the holy. The second chapter, in turn, explores the limits of reason in its ability to proceed beyond the boundaries of the visible. And here the contested territory is not nature, but our understanding of human life as such, along with the requirements for certain kinds of understanding, the requirements for "seeing." The third chapter very briefly suggests that relations between human beings, understood in relation to the ethical realm, cannot be adequately grasped in purely secular or worldly terms. And the fourth chapter reaches a similar conclusion with regard to what has been seen by modernity as its greatest achievement: the understanding of nature through modern science, whose ability to comprehend nature as it presents itself to us, that is to "save the appearances," is limited by a skepticism and indeed a "methodological atheism" that must always remain a precondition of science itself. That is, the "*dianoetic*" or explanatory account of science must be completed by a "*noetic*" or contemplative account, proceeding from humility and ascetic purification.

Chapter One Strange Beauty: Environmental Aesthetics After Humanism

Titles can be ambiguous. And so too can subtitles. To speak of “environmental aesthetics after humanism” is not necessarily to suggest a new phase or condition of something already extant. It could also mean that environmental aesthetics is something that succeeds humanism, indeed is perhaps itself possible only “after” humanism. Even today, environmental aesthetics exists more as a possibility than as an actuality.

This essay, then, will pursue three interrelated questions: (1) What is environmental aesthetics *as* a possibility? (2) Why does it become a possibility only “after” humanism? (3) Why is the beauty that it seeks to understand something that is “strange”?

Part One: The Possibility and Promise of Environmental Aesthetics

Seventy years ago, looking back on the actual devastation wrought by World War II, and looking ahead to the even greater possible devastation of a nuclear conflagration, Albert Camus wrote a short essay that he called “Helen’s Exile.” Comparing our own world to that of the ancient Greeks, he argued that even before the two world wars, we had already created a metaphysical wasteland by turning our backs upon nature—turning our backs both on its beauty and on the lessons of limitation and finite permanence that we should have learned from it. Turning away from the natural world, we in the West have turned toward history in the belief that here alone we can find our proper human element, embracing the world of cities and people and artifice in intoxicated dreams of infinite progress. Camus contends that, “deliberately, the world has been amputated of all that constitutes its permanence: nature, the sea, hilltops, evening meditation. Consciousness is to be found only in the

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_1

streets, because history is to be found in the streets."[1] Yet we cannot live without beauty, and the limits that the Greeks learned from nature will not be defied by us indefinitely or with impunity. "In a drunken sky we light up the suns we want… We… have conquered, moved boundaries, mastered heaven and earth. Our reason has driven all away. Alone at last, we end up by ruling over a desert… We turn our backs on nature; we are ashamed of beauty."[2]

Two decades later, the awareness became widespread that we had wrought yet another desolation: a global devastation of the natural environment. Yet the philosophical response to this devastation did not entail a call to renewed heeding of the beauty of nature that we had exiled, but instead remained encapsulated within the sphere of the human, formulating itself as an environmental ethics. It should, of course, be added at once that this was an ethical project that took seriously the notion of limits, specifically of constraints upon human dealings with nature. But why, it may be asked, was beauty left out of the picture? Why an environmental ethics, and not also an environmental aesthetics? Surely at least one reason is that in view of the urgent environmental problems which they sought to address, philosophers looked for the discourse that would be most expeditious in persuading people to change their modes of behavior, and it was supposed that normative language—the discourse of moral imperative—would be most effective. But in looking back, it hardly seems that this has proved to be the case. After almost 50 years, has any concept from environmental ethics been taken up in the public discussion of environmental issues? Do policy makers cite work in environmental ethics? Has research in environmental ethics made its way into congressional testimony? Has it even made a major impact on other academic disciplines that deal with the natural environment?

The intention here is by no means to disparage environmental ethics: may its influence even yet be felt. Indeed, I hope that this appraisal is wrong, but I fear that it is not. It is my hope too that environmental ethics can overcome the moral extensionism that begins with theories of moral obligation formulated to account for the moral standing of persons, or of sentient beings generally, and stretch them to fit very different needs. But once again, why not environmental aesthetics? When the question is posed of why we should bother with preserving the natural environment, isn't our native and spontaneous response to answer, "Because it is so beautiful"? And isn't this the answer that *does* work in congressional testimony and popular rhetoric? Why have philosophers found the beauty of nature so lacking as a ground for respecting and preserving the environment that they have hardly even mentioned it at all? Why are we so hesitant to evoke beauty—not just in environmental discussions, but in our contemporary discourse as such?

There are, of course, historical reasons for this. In one of the few, and perhaps the earliest philosophical mentions of natural beauty, Socrates responds to Phaedrus' enraptured discourse about the beauty of the surrounding countryside by telling him

---

[1] Albert Camus, "Helen's Exile," in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 189.

[2] Ibid., pp. 188f.

that he would really rather be back inside the city gates, talking to other people from whom he might actually learn something. And philosophy since then, with few exceptions, has followed his suggestion. Here and there—in some of the Platonists, with several of the medievals, in Burke and in Kant—natural beauty has been addressed in passing. But for the most part, Western philosophers have joined with Hegel—who saw Kant's starry heavens as a "gleaming leprosy in the sky"—in mentioning natural beauty only disparagingly, by rendering it as at best a dim anticipation of the more authentic beauty to be found in art. Indeed, the field of aesthetics—itself a poor step-sister of more prestigious philosophical disciplines—has largely abandoned the topic of beauty, even to the extent of declaring aesthetics to be not just the philosophy of art, but the philosophy of art criticism.

What should be the agenda for an environmental aesthetics? What tasks should it undertake? I will enumerate very briefly here six issues that I believe an environmental aesthetics needs to address, since I shall be addressing most of them in the second and third parts of this paper.

First, natural beauty needs to have restored to it an ontological standing. This is the first, and most pressing need, because aesthetics itself was founded under the premise that the proper locus for aesthetic inquiry was in *aisthêsis* or sense perception. But if beauty is something residing only in our senses, and in accompanying judgments of "taste," there is hardly much hope that it will serve as a grounds for changing our course of actions. Sensations are various and they are cheap, an interchangeable currency of nickels and dimes that can be easily acquired and thoughtlessly spent. Only if beauty is something that belongs to the mountain itself and the forest itself, and not just to our sensations of it, will it ever serve as a ground for persuading others to respect and preserve these things. And this, of course, suggests that much of modern aesthetics will be of limited help, given its long-standing commitment to the primacy of human subjectivity in understanding the aesthetic.

Second, there is need for a new model of aesthetic appreciation. Classical aesthetics supposed that there must be an emotional detachment, an aesthetic distance, for beauty to be apprehended. Perhaps this applies to art, but it does not work well for natural beauty. Even popular aesthetic sensibilities are progressing beyond this with regard to nature, and it is widely understood that to merely gaze out upon a landscape as something "scenic" is in fact to "see" very little of it at all. Much better to get out into nature and interact with it as a hiker or camper, a kayaker or rock climber. It is through involving ourselves with nature that its beauty is best and most truly encountered, and accordingly we need an interactive model for its appreciation.

Third, what is the relation between our knowledge of nature and our experience of its beauty? Knowledge of nature can seem to subvert our ability to appreciate it aesthetically. We know this especially in peninsular Florida, which has been invaded by a host of exotic plant species. What to the untrained eye seems a lovely thicket of glossy-leafed trees appears to the more educated eye as an invasive takeover of native flora by Brazilian pepper trees. Many thick pine forests throughout the Southeast appear to be downright primeval to someone who has not looked carefully enough to see that these are monocultured plantings set in straight diagonal

rows, neither more nor less primeval than a field of corn. The writer Mark Twain complained that his knowledge of the dangers of navigating the Mississippi, gained as a river boat pilot, destroyed all the charm and enchantment that had drawn him to the river in the first place. Yet knowledge can also enhance our aesthetic appreciation of nature, giving us a way (or even a basis, as Allen Carlson has argued) to unify our aesthetic perceptions of nature, much as an understanding of impressionism helps us to better appreciate a painting by Monet.

Fourth, what is the relation between the good and the beautiful in nature? There are features of the natural world that strike us as repugnant, and often our revulsion is rooted in moral intuition. For example, in her arresting book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard dwells in length on the ubiquity of parasitism in nature, and offers a grim catalogue of examples. Does a better knowledge of food chains and ecological balance resolve this dissonance for us? Is our disgust at such things merely an anthropocentrism that we should strive to discard? Is there a hidden goodness underneath the horrors? Can we appeal to a resolution at the level of *kosmos* by evoking metaphysical principles? Or need we even feel obliged to find beauty in everything natural?

Fifth, if our aesthetic valuation of nature is not to be restricted to the scenic and picturesque, or to the cute and cuddly, we need an expanded typology of the kinds of natural beauty and the modalities of aesthetic response. Paul Ziff has pointed out the wide variety of modes of appreciation (which he calls "aspections") that are appropriate to the work of different artists, different schools of art, and different artistic media, and surely this applies to our aesthetic appreciation of nature as well. Indeed, at least one example of this comes to mind easily: the philosophical concept of the sublime, as distinct from the classically beautiful, made possible the rise of Romanticism and the inception of sensibilities enabling us to appreciate for the first time the beauty of towering mountains and rugged seacoasts. What other modalities of the beautiful await our ability to appreciate them? Of great urgency in Florida, where the author has lived for the last 30 years, is the cultivation of a sensibility that will allow us to see the beauty of swamps and other wetlands. Thoreau gives us a hint of how to proceed when he talks of the incomparable "wildness" of swamplands. Is there an aesthetic of wildness that is distinct from the aesthetics of the sublime? And Heidegger, in discussing the work of the German poet Hölderlin, describes an experience of the beautiful in nature that he calls the holy: the experience of the wholeness or integrity, as well as the healing power of the natural.

This leads to the sixth and last item of this agenda, the ability, and willingness, to articulate philosophically the transcendent as it is encountered in nature. Since the decline of metaphysics, and despite a few notable exceptions, philosophy has all but given up on the enterprise of understanding the numinous. Yet those who have best explored the beauty of nature not primarily in a conceptual manner but within the depths of their own experience—from Coleridge and Emerson, to Burroughs and Muir, to Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, Scott Momaday, and Annie Dillard in our own time—have invariably seen at its heart something uncanny, something sacred, something awe-full, something holy, something transcending entirely their accustomed world, something other than the human.

Part Two: Environmental Aesthetics After Humanism

It has not been long since the time when the term "humanism" evoked unequivocal sympathies within the spheres of intellectual discourse, nor is it a simple task to identify the point at which it fell largely into disfavor. Even in his famous "Letter on Humanism," published in the late forties, about the same time as Camus' essay, Heidegger goes to some lengths to defend his position against the "humanism" that Sartre was eager to claim and that helped the latter philosopher to gain a wide popular audience. Joseph Wood Krutch championed a humanism of sorts throughout the fifties to widespread acclaim (although it should be emphasized that Krutch's humanism was always balanced by his books on nature.) Bertrand Russell somehow managed to uphold the banner of humanism through the sixties, although by then it had lost some of its triumphalist cachet. Yet by the end of that decade, Edward Abbey could express his reluctance to dispatch a rattlesnake beneath his porch by writing sardonically, "I'm a humanist; I'd rather kill a *man* than a snake." During this time in Europe, structuralists and post-structuralists were gradually subverting humanist premises and sensibilities. And by the end of the seventies, the biologist and environmentalist David Ehrenfeld was able to throw down the gauntlet openly in the title of his highly-regarded book, *The Arrogance of Humanism*.

After the apocalypse of World War Two and the Holocaust, after three decades of living with the possibility of nuclear apocalypse, the looming apocalypse of global environmental degradation and possible collapse dealt perhaps the final blow to the humanism of the popular sort which had placed a quasi-religious faith in the unlimited possibilities of humanity. (Indeed, when juxtaposed with this litany of human-induced menace, viciousness, and catastrophe, the term "unlimited possibilities" has a woeful ring.) "Humanism" in Ehrenfeld's book is inclusive of this popular sense, but combines it with what came to be known in environmental philosophy as "anthropocentrism," a term commonly understood to be the view that whatever "value" the natural environment might seem to possess was in fact derivative from human valuations. Humanism as the celebration of unlimited human possibilities. Humanism as "anthropocentrism," the view (in our time, traceable to Nietzsche) that human beings are the source of all value. Both senses of humanism are called into question by any attempt to think seriously about what we have done to the natural world around us. Indeed, both seem to be indices of that very *hubris* that has wrought such havoc upon the natural environment, as well as to possess a terrible synergy between themselves. If humans are the source of all value, if nature has worth only as we value it, then those celebrated "unlimited possibilities" of humanity need leave nothing on earth pristine, wild, and sacrosanct.

Heidegger's critique of humanism is important for showing that both of these meanings derive from a common ground, but even more so for tracing the origins of humanism back behind the modern era—behind Russell and Sartre, behind Nietzsche, behind Feuerbach and Marx, behind the humanism of the Renaissance—and showing how humanism is implicated in some of the most widely held premises of Western thought. "*Humanitas*," writes Heidegger, "explicitly so called, was first

considered and striven for in the age of the Roman Republic… The first humanism, Roman humanism, and every kind that has emerged from that time to the present, has presupposed the most universal "essence" of man to be obvious. Man is considered to be an *animal rationale*. This definition is not simply the Latin translation of the Greek *zoôn logon echon* but rather a metaphysical interpretation of it."[3]

According to Heidegger, humanism sees the essence of our *humanitas*, the ground of our dignity as human beings, as consisting in our *own* ability to ground all that is by means of *ratio* (reason). *Ratio*, he argues, translates not only *logos*, but also *hypokeimenon*, that which underlies or more literally translated, is put underneath. In reasoning—that is in rendering up the reasons for what is—human beings at the same time render the *subjectum* or ground for what is. *Logos*, what for the early Greeks was the gathering-together of what-always-already-lies-present-before-us, becomes in the Hellenistic world the human rendering of reasons for, and hence grounding of, all that is. In humanism, Heidegger claims, human beings lose touch with the interplay of presence and absence into which they are called. Moreover, with the onset of humanism begins a decisive withdrawal of what he calls "the holy." "Subjected" to the grounding of the *ratio*, the mystery of the world withdraws behind an onslaught of reasons. Yet Heidegger is emphatic that his critique does not imply a flight into the irrational, but rather a listening for, and an awaiting of, that sense of being that is neither rational nor irrational, neither ground nor abyss, because it precedes the *ratio* altogether.

It is not our task here to follow Heidegger far into this territory. But from this brief consideration of his critique, we can draw a general understanding of humanism as a grounding, or a providing of foundations, for all that is, in the human exercise of rationality. Therefore, humanism in this third sense means that human rationality provides not only the reasons, but the *rationale* for all that is (the second, or "anthropocentric" sense of humanism), while at the same time offering up unlimited possibilities in its exercise (the first, or "triumphalist" sense). Not human beings as such, but the rationality that constitutes their essence, becomes the measure of all things. *Before* humanism, the Greek word "*logos*" points back toward that interplay of revealing and concealing to which human beings can find themselves called to respond and co-respond. From *within* humanism, and its antecedents in the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, the Latin word "*ratio*" points ahead to Descartes, for whom human consciousness as such will become the genuine *subjectum*, over against which the world will be held as mere ob-ject, and beyond this, points to modern science and technology, in which the *ratio* does not simply posit the world as fit to its own size and shape, but actually makes it to conform.

All of this might seem rather remote from important issues of aesthetics. But it can help us understand why from its very beginning the concept of beauty in philosophy has been bound up with the notions of form, and order, and symmetry, and proportion, and ratio—i.e. can help us see that aesthetic thinking, from its very inception, was thoroughly humanistic, and for this reason was profoundly allergic

[3] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 200ff.

to the wild, unbounded, and non-human beauty of the natural environment. Nor for that matter has aesthetics been adequate to understand the beauty of art. As Heidegger argues in "The Origin of the Work of Art," the key concepts of aesthetics have been the main concepts of metaphysics, and they have consistently led us away from the beauty of art rather than brought us closer to understanding it. Above all others, he singles out the concept of "form" as both the most central, as well as the most deleterious, for aesthetic thinking. How does the humanistic enterprise, and the metaphysical project from which it derives, come to take notions like "form" as keys to understanding the beautiful?

Humanism situates itself between a claim about humanity —that its essence consists in rationality—and a claim about the being of what is—the claim that to the extent that an entity has being at all, it is amenable to the measure of reason. If, as Plato maintains, and as the tradition of Western metaphysics holds along with him for the next two millennia, "beauty" is simply the name for the manifest self-showing of being; and if an entity has being only to the extent that it corresponds to the measure of reason; then beauty must possess this measure. The soul, which in the *Republic* Plato initially characterizes in terms of *logismos* or calculation, is correspondingly adequate for the measure. (In the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, we get another, more ecstatic view of the relation between the soul and the beautiful, but this is not the view whose influence has been efficacious in Western thought and experience.) For Aristotle too beauty is a kind of *metron* or measure: "the chief forms of beauty," he states in the *Metaphysics*, "are order and symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree." (1078b2) Correspondingly, he notes in the same book that both knowledge (*epistēmē*) and sensation (*aisthēsis*) can be seen as kinds of measuring, although properly speaking, they are measured themselves by the measure of the things correctly known and sensed. (1053a30—1053b5).

What Thoreau called "wildness" surely corresponds in some large degree to the what Nietzsche called the "Dionysian" in Greek experience, and it was in the Temple of Dionysus, and during the celebration of Dionysus, that Greek tragedies were performed. It is, then, remarkable, even marvelous, to watch Aristotle set to work his notions of form, and order, and unity, and symmetry in the task of understanding Greek tragedy, i.e. in trying to comprehend the eruption of the wild and strange into the sphere of the human. Yet ultimately, the language of reason and the tropes of mathematics fail him, and to understand what is at work in tragedy, he must resort to a concept as strange as what is set forth in the tragedy itself: to the concept of *catharsis*, ("cleansing" or "purification") a term that was then more at home in the occult realms of the ancient mystery religions.

I am claiming, then, that the concepts associated with measure and form—the para-mathematical concepts of symmetry and balance and proportion and unity—are not adequate for comprehending the beauty that is created by human beings to present to one another, let alone for understanding the beauty that nature presents to us. I am claiming that they are not adequate to the dimensions of the beautiful, and that when we rely on them in aesthetic understanding, they distort the beautiful itself, while at the same time blinding us to the manifold and perhaps heterogeneous

modalities of the beautiful. I do not, however, wish to suggest that the traditional language of aesthetics is necessarily distorting, or to imply that it should be abandoned, but rather that it needs to be supplemented, especially if an environmental aesthetics is to become more than a possibility. Humanistic aesthetics sees beauty only as it stands in proportion to the human, only in its kinship with us, only as we are at home with it, only in its domestic varieties. But surely an environmental aesthetic must find its proper element not in domesticity, but in wildness; not in what is measured, but in what is unmeasured; not in the homely, but in the strange and uncanny. An environmental aesthetic must be posterior to humanism.

Part Three: Strange Beauty

Earlier this evening, that is, earlier in the evening in which I am writing/did write these words, I decided to go paddling. I am fortunate to be able to walk a few yards across the road to a small floating dock where I keep my kayak, and from there paddle out into Big Bayou, a body of water connected to Tampa Bay. In doing this, I become a stranger. I go from my home, a fully human world, to a world of herons and egrets and ospreys, to a world of glassy-calm water and mangroves and leaping mullet and floating seaweed, and tonight, to a world of dolphins. I was already caught up by the play of light on the smooth surface, already caught up by the colors in the sky as the sun began to set, already caught up by the elaborate play of two ospreys, when I came upon a school of dolphins. I followed them at a distance of 10 or 15 yards as they slowly headed out into Tampa Bay, watched them arch out of them water and back in as they fed, heard their snorts as they exhaled and inhaled, and shared their world for a half hour or so. As the sun set, I paddled back, tied up my kayak, and returned home feeling that I had received a blessing—feeling a bit like Melville's Ishmael having been surrounded by the "Grand Armada." I feel it now, even as I sit typing at my computer. It was a blessing of the beautiful.

Yet it was a strange beauty with which I was anointed, a beauty that has nothing to do with measure and proportion, unless I choose to go off into some abstractions about food chains and ecological balance. But what I am speaking about is enchantment, not environmental science, of which nothing could have been further from my mind. In here, in my house, things are in order. Out there, on the other side of the shoreline, in the strange and sudden topographical twist whereby I become a stranger, there is neither order nor disorder, but the play of light and color, of water and sky, of ospreys enouncing a vocabulary that will never be mine, and of enormous snorting dolphins emerging now here and now there and now many places at once and just as suddenly gone again as I realize that it is now almost dark. I was lost in a world not my own, and glad to be lost. I did not take its measure, nor did I want to, nor do I even want to say that it took *my* measure. If anything, its blessing was a reminder that there are other, greater measures than the human and the rational.

Allen Carlson, one of the few philosophers to have written anything concerning environmental aesthetics, struggles to fit experiences like these into the language

and concepts of humanistic aesthetics. Seeking to find a unifying ground for aesthetic experience of nature, he locates it in scientific understanding, which he feels provides a sort of unifying "frame" that will provide boundaries and save us from what he feels would otherwise be a Jamesian "blooming buzzing confusion." Following his advice, I should have been thinking about the ecology of Tampa Bay and the feeding habits of marine mammals instead of getting caught up in the drama. Doing so, I would not have felt engulfed by my surroundings, a stranger in a strange and wonderful land, but instead I would have felt at home in my own understanding, a rational appreciator and comprehending connoisseur of the natural environment. But for this, I could have stayed inside and watched the Discovery Channel! I don't want to diminish the role of knowledge here. I knew enough about dolphins to understand that they were feeding, to know that they were not especially dangerous, to know from experience roughly how close I could get without alarming them, and so on. But all of this enhances the beauty: it is hardly its basis. To make it so is to continue in the same course that has kept us from taking natural beauty seriously since the time of Greek antiquity, to continue ordering it to conform to the *ratio*, forcing it to fit into the frame of the human.

For humanistic aesthetics, which is for the mainstream aesthetics of the Western philosophical tradition, beauty consists in conformity to the *ratio*, consists in order, proportion, symmetry. Accordingly, this has confined our experience of the beautiful in nature to three realms, while at the same time distorting it even within these realms. First, there is the preeminent beauty of the heavens, a beauty that consists not just in the dazzling light of unthinkably distant destinations, but in the orderly movement of the heavenly bodies themselves. It is a paradigmatic beauty, not only because it enchants us, but because it is perfectly comprehensible to reason, and to mathematics in particular. Second, there is pastoral beauty in nature, the beauty of fields and flocks. This too is a beauty of order, but here it is an ordered rather than an orderly beauty, for the central image of the pastoral is the shepherd, the keeper of order among otherwise unruly sheep. (We might recall here that in the *Republic*, Plato represents the calculating part of the soul with the image of the shepherd.) Pastoral beauty is the beauty of farms, whose order requires farmers, and of gardens, whose order comes from the work of gardeners. Third, there are individual objects in nature that we may find beautiful. An oval stone, a tree whose limbs are well balanced, or a flower with its petals symmetrically arranged around the center. By the time of the Renaissance, the symmetry and proportionality of aesthetic objects becomes more subtle and complex, as we can see in the drawings and paintings of animal and human bodies done by artists such as Leonardo and Dürer. Gradually, we can find entire landscapes which meet the criteria of order, balance, and proportionality, until a point of sophistication is reached at which balance itself needs to be balanced with just the right proportion of irregularity, in which case we have a landscape that, if it is properly framed, can be seen as "picturesque."

So important does the notion of the picturesque become in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that a machine was invented to help capture it. It was called the "Claude glass," and consisted of "a small black convex glass used for reflecting landscapes in miniature so as to show their broad tonal values, without distracting

detail or color."[4] It was widely used not only by artists, but also by travelers in search of the scenic and picturesque. And perhaps most interesting of all, since it presented a reflected image of the picturesque landscape, it functioned only when the viewer turned his back upon the landscape itself! The Claude glass, then, can itself serve as an image of humanist aesthetics in general, i.e. of an aesthetic which finds nature beautiful only as it turns its back upon what emerges and recedes of its own accord (upon what the ancient Greeks called *physis*) for the purpose of framing it into an order proportionate to the human.

But during the time of the Claude glass, there was a second movement underway in Western aesthetic sensibilities. The notion of the sublime, originated by Longinus in the second century A.D., had effectively lain dormant since then. So much was this the case that mountain landscapes were seen as dreadful and repulsive and, as Marjorie Hope Nicholson documents, coach travelers through mountain regions were protected from the hideous sights around them by having the shades drawn down. Longinus' Greek text was translated into French in the seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth century the concept of the sublime was given extensive treatment by Burke and Kant, just as educated tastes and tasteful artists sought out the sublime in wild mountain regions, towering cliffs and crashing waves, in hair-raising storms, and now in the heavens, whose sublimity consists not in mathematical order, but in the degree to which their vastness overwhelms us. Kant characterizes the sublime in a representative way in his early work, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*:

> Finer feeling, which we now wish to consider, is chiefly of two kinds: the feeling of the *sublime*, and that of the *beautiful*. The stirring of each is pleasant, but in different ways… The description of a raging storm, or Milton's portrayal of the infernal kingdom, arouse enjoyment but with horror; on the other hand, the sight of flower-strewn meadows… or Homer's portrayal of the girdle of Venus, also occasion a pleasant sensation but one that is joyous and smiling… Night is sublime, day is beautiful… The sublime *moves*, the beautiful *charms*… The sublime must always be great; the beautiful can also be small. The sublime must be simple; the beautiful can be adorned and ornamented.[5]

In Kant's Third *Critique*, published almost 30 years later, his characterization of the "dynamically sublime" in nature is more dramatic: "Bold, overhanging, and… threatening rocks, thunder-clouds piled up the vault of heaven, borne along with flashes and peals, volcanoes in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes leaving desolation in their track, the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river…" Yet remarkably, in this same passage, he goes on to maintain that what is sublime, after all, is not nature itself, but ourselves as independent of nature due to our dignity as rational agents! "Therefore nature," he concludes, "is here called sublime merely because it raises the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make itself sensible of the

---

[4] Ian Chilvers, Harold Osborne, Dennis Farr, *The Oxford Dictionary of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 109.

[5] Immanuel Kant, *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960, pp.46f.

appropriate sublimity of the sphere of its own being, even above nature…. Sublimity, therefore, does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us."[6] Just when it seemed that philosophical aesthetics was about to break free from the dominance of *humanitas* and *ratio* over natural beauty, humanism returns with a vengeance through the back door. Looking out into the heart of nature's power, we find instead not the dynamism of the cosmos, but merely another image of the human.

Yet there are other approaches to the sublime,—some of which lead well beyond it—nor is what this concept articulates subverted by reductionist claims such as Kant's. For example, the contemporary geographer Yi-Fu Tuan sees the experience of the sublime in nature as involving a setting out from home, and so too from the homely aesthetics of the domestic and the pastoral. "Beyond the orderly farm—the humanized landscape–lie dark forests, wild mountains, and stormy seas. These primal forces of nature in turn become landscape—objects of portrayal that, in the eighteenth century, were designated as sublime. The meaning of the sublime," he continues, "has changed over time… One can be drawn to the sublime as, in a more religious phase of human history, one was drawn to the holy, to light, splendor, and the numinous—the *mysterium tremendum* that is beyond human rational understanding. Surely Job experienced the sublime when God spoke to him out of the whirlwind, as have mystics throughout the world who have pushed beyond normal experience to touch the heights and depths of the wholly other." Today, however, truly wild nature has shrunk dramatically, and Tuan draws what he feels is the right conclusion: "In the modern period, only the great ice plateaus [of the Arctic regions] remain almost wholly free of people and their heavy imprint. There, experiencing the sublime is still an ever-present possibility. Ice plateaus lie at the other extremity of the world of shelter and nurture that is home."[7] He goes on to discuss at some length remarkable writing by two explorers: the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen and the American Richard E. Byrd. He might also have included the more recent, and equally stunning book of Barry Lopez called *Arctic Dreams*. Here we find at last a strange beauty indeed, a beauty that is mixed with silence and enormity and terror and peace, a strange beauty into which we are privileged to enter, not one that we can subject to the order of rationality.

Happily, Lopez is by no mean alone in articulating a beauty beyond the human, and so too beyond the aesthetics of humanism. I have already mentioned Annie Dillard, and it has been many readings with students of her book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, that have more than anything else inspired the questioning that led to the present essay. Heidegger has argued that in an age of completed metaphysics, it takes a leap—a leap out of metaphysics—to stand on the very ground beneath our feet. Parallel to this, Dillard undertakes a pilgrimage, a quest for the holy and its

[6] Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meridith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 110–114.

[7] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993), pp. 114f

blessing, in the very place she already lives, at Tinker Creek. "What is out there?" she keeps asking in view of the strange and wonderful glimpses of beauty she keeps uncovering, but also in view of their effervescence and their admixture with the repulsive and the dire. Edward Abbey, writing of the beautiful and terrible desert lands of the American Southwest, speaks to us of a strange beauty as well. And Lopez, Dillard, and Abbey are only a few of the nature writers who have been articulating new senses of natural beauty, modalities of beauty in nature that are new to philosophy. There are antecedents, too, in the nineteenth century, most notably Thoreau—almost speechless and barely coherent at the summit of Mount Ktahdin, inwardly screaming "*Contact! Contact!*"—and later John Muir, as he swings jubilantly at the top of tall pines, at the height of a tempest, listening enthusiastically to the music of giant trees as they snap in two, one after another, all around him. Everywhere in wild nature, Muir finds a strange and sublimely beautiful reality that wonderfully transcends the human-all-too-human.

But where have the philosophers been? Where are the philosophical concepts to understand this strange beauty? Where is the lexicon to articulate these wonders? The notion of the sublime is simply inadequate for this task. (Of the cultural standing of the concept of the sublime, philosopher Mary Mothersill writes, "By the middle of the nineteenth century the term 'sublime' had largely disappeared from the critical vocabulary, and had begun to sound archaic. Late-twentieth-century students have to have it explained, and it survives only in mock-literary writing—in restaurant guides, for example, where it is applied to pastries and rich desserts."[8]) But where, I repeat, have the philosophers been? I fear that to some extent they have been too preoccupied with following (and sometimes leading) the latest fashions in the visual and performing arts, and in literature as well—many of which have long stood guilty of Camus' indictment of being embarrassed by beauty. But this is just a guess. Perhaps they just don't like getting outdoors: perhaps philosophers are mostly a bunch of city kids like Socrates. Most of all, however, philosophers are still too closely bound to the premises and sensibilities of humanism to see the task that lies before them. And it is not just a scholarly task. As Baird Callicott has noted, we are unlikely to take the measures needed to preserve swamps and marshes and bogs unless we are able to see their beauty.[9] Nor is it just a practical task, but a spiritual task as well. *Nothing is more deadly to our very humanity than to look out and see no more than our own human reflection*. Heidegger is right in his claim that humanism, by placing us at the pinnacle of what is, shows too low a regard for humanity, not one that is too high. Indeed, isn't this one of the most important reasons for preserving the strange beauty of wildlands: that here we can find a shining of being that allows us to leave behind for a time our petty human concerns and preoccupations, and return home with a larger, better, truer perspective? Aesthetics, needs to bring its energies to bear in understanding the strange beauty of nature before that beauty is lost altogether, or worse yet, before we forget why we should even care.

---

[8] David Cooper (ed.), *A Companion to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 411.

[9] J. Baird Callicott, "Leopold's Land Aesthetic," in *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

Chapter Two Hidden Patency: On the Iconic Character of Human Life

An elder was once asked, 'What is a compassionate heart?' He replied:

'It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals, for demons and for all that exists. At the recollection and at the sight of them such a person's eyes overflow with tears owing to the vehemence of the compassion which grips his heart; as a result of his deep mercy his heart shrinks and cannot bear to hear or look on any injury or the slightest suffering of anything in creation.

'This is why he constantly offers up prayers full of tears, even for the irrational animals and for the enemies of truth, even for those who harm him, so that they may be protected and find mercy.

'He even prays for the reptiles as a result of the great compassion which is poured out beyond measure—after the likeness of God—in his heart.'

St Isaac of Syria

And I, most sinful, dare to partake of thy whole Body. Let me not be consumed but receive me as thou didst them, and enlighten the perceptions of my soul …

St. John of Damascus (A prayer of preparation for Holy Communion, St. John of Damascus, 1956)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Matthew 5:8

1

The understanding of knowledge as a kind of seeing goes back at least as far as Parmenides, whose narrative poem tells how he was taken in an ethereal chariot by the Daughters of the Sun to the gates of the *Dikē*, goddess of right, who grants him a vision of unchanging being, toward which mortals otherwise remain unseeing. Significantly, he does not claim to be viewing a different world, but rather seeing the same world that everyone else sees. Just seeing it better, more truly. But it is

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_2

Plato who seizes upon this equation of seeing and knowing so consistently and forcefully, that it becomes definitive for philosophical thought: what is known whenever there is true knowledge is the *eidos* or invisible "looks," rendering knowing as by nature a seeing, while ignorance is a kind of blindness, an inability to see and perhaps sometimes an unwillingness to see. Moreover, in Plato there is no distinction between "practical" and "theoretical" knowledge, knowledge of the good and knowledge of the real. Indeed, it is normative knowledge—knowledge of the just, of the beautiful, of the godly—with which Plato's "epistemology" characteristically concerns itself, even as he notes that most people will not acknowledge and see *(idein)* that there is justice itself and beauty itself, in addition to just deeds and beautiful things, and so consign themselves to a kind of darkness, persist in a kind of blindness (*Republic*, 476a-d). Like dreamers, they see only the image *(eikōn),* yet without realizing that it is an image at all. That is, failing to see the "original" that is made manifest by, and in, the image, they live in a dream-world of unacknowledged images, of images that are taken to be originals and not seen *as* images—a condition calling for a seeing that is at the same time an awakening. It calls for a departure from the darkness of the cave (an underworld of unacknowledged images, and thus of blindness and sleep) into the light, a journey which he notes can incur its own kind of blindness, not from too little but from too much light.[1]

But what happens when we "see," and yet fail to see, know and yet act as if we didn't know? Aristotle address the problem of *akrasia* or moral blindness in Book VII of his *Nichomachean Ethics,* concluding that in such a case the knowledge lies dormant, unactualized, lacking the specific vision that will bring it into play—seeing, to vary Aristotle's example, only that this person is exquisitely attractive, while at the same time overlooking, really failing to see, perhaps being quite unwilling to see, that this same person is married, even while knowing all along that adultery in general is wrong. Parallel to Plato, Aristotle compares this kind of moral blindness to sleep, but also to drunkenness and to madness (1147a12, 1152a14). The drunk, the sleeper, the madman, and the morally blind individuals all fail to see what is before their very eyes. Yet at the same time, again in agreement with Plato, Aristotle recognizes a more endemic, and less corrigible, blindness that is bound up with the human condition itself: "for as the eyes of bats are to the light of day, so is the eye *(nous)* of our soul in relation to the things which are by nature most evident of all" (*Metaphysics*, 993b10). Both Plato and Aristotle maintain—quite as much as St. Paul, if for somewhat different reasons—that the human condition is subject to a manifold blindness that serves as its steady state, its default condition.[2]

[1] Plato's cave allegory at the beginning of Book VII in the *Republic* contextualizes many aspects of this problem, while the "divided line" analogy at the end of Book VI presents the image/original relation as characteristic of knowledge at all levels. On the proper seeing of images as a "double seeing," cf. Jacob Klein, *Commentary on Plato's Meno.*

[2] This view was to hold in the West for well over a thousand years, until its gradual erosion beginning in the Middle Ages, and accelerating at the dawn of modernity, to a point at which Descartes would call for improvements in the methodology of human thought so "progressive" that they would allow us to live perpetually in a world of "clear and distinct ideas," a state of "Enlightenment."

It is possible to see without seeing at all. “It’s been sitting right in front of you. How could you miss it?” Or more grievously: “It was all done out of love! How could I have been so blind?” And there are things that are by their nature evident, patent, yet difficult to see. “It’s just down the road. You can’t miss it!” Or more significantly, consider the logical positivist A. J. Ayer, inwardly changed by a “near-death experience,” and unexpectedly seeing what his previous philosophical conclusions had presented him from seeing:

> He admitted to St Aubyn that there had been “a kind of resurrection,” as he started to notice scenery for the first time. Driving to France with Dee’s sister Priscilla, he stopped on the mountain above La Ciotat: “And I suddenly looked out at the sea and thought, ‘my God how beautiful this is’ and for all those years, for twenty six years I had never really looked at it before.”[3]

There are many modalities of seeing and non-seeing.

Rilke describes a blindness that is more existential than aesthetic in the first of his *Duino Elegies*:

> Indeed, each Spring needed you.
> Many a star was waiting for you to notice it.
> Many a wave rose toward you out of the past
> or a violin offered itself
> as you passed by an open window.
> These were a trust, your mission.
> But could you complete it?
> Weren’t you always distracted,
> waiting for something… ?[4]

Kierkegaard saw a comic blindness in the ostensible completion of the Hegelian system, which nevertheless failed to notice that the author himself was an existing individual, still living and thus himself quite incomplete—i.e. failed to apprehend that the author of the encyclopedia was himself omitted from it. Less comical is Kierkegaard’s reminder that when God Himself walked upon the earth, most people who saw Him did not even notice.[5] But were they simply not paying sufficient attention? Was there some particular feature of Jesus’ countenance that they overlooked? For the golden halo of divine light that surrounds Christ the icon is not a representation of some feature visible to the passerby, yet somehow overlooked by most, but rather the visible presentation in the icon of something that was in reality invisible: that Christ was an inhabitant not just of this world but of another world, a world

---

More recently the German philosopher Heidegger tried to reclaim the wisdom inherent in the Greek word for truth itself: *a-lethêia,* un-hiddeness, un-concealment, with its implication that concealment and hiddeness are always the given.

[3] Ben Rogers, *A. J. Ayer: A Life*, Grove Press, 1999, p. 349.

[4] Rilke, *The Duino Elegies*, “The First Elegy,” l. 25–31. The translation is my own, although it draws heavily on those of Leishman & Spender (1939) and Young (1978).

[5] For a critique of Kierkegaard’s stronger, and less coherent, claim that immediate experience of God is in fact impossible, and thus that the divinity of Christ was not patent at all, see Engelhardt (2000). pp. 100ff.

unseen by most, a world for which sight must be given and eyes opened, the Kingdom of God.

In Dostoevsky's masterpiece, *The Brothers Karamazov,* the Elder Zosima relates how his adolescent brother had undergone a wondrous change as he neared an untimely death. Remorseful over his previous bitterness and cynicism, yet weeping with joy, he asks for forgiveness even from the birds singing outside his window: "Birds of God, joyful birds, you, too, must forgive me, because I have also sinned before you… Yes… there was so much of God's glory around me: birds, trees, meadows, sky, and I alone lived in shame, I alone dishonored everything, and did not notice the beauty and glory of it all." Awakened, his eyes opened, he now sees that "life is paradise, but we do not want to know it, and if we did want to know it, tomorrow there would be paradise the world over."[6]

2

We live in paradise already, surrounded like Adam by the glory of God, yet somehow we fail to see it. We meet the eternal God at the side of a dusty road, and somehow fail to notice. Someone writes a book about everything, but somehow forgets to include himself. We live a life, and encounter countless other lives, that are not just mundane, but sacred, yet somehow think of life (including our own) as insignificant, as something to be compromised or bartered or disposed of. Why don't we see? And are there different kinds of non-seeing?

A student struggles with a geometrical proof and finally sees the answer, which subsequently seems easy. It is not at first apparent how to retrieve voice mail from a certain telephone. The instruction sheet says to insert the peg D3 into notch Y7, and it takes time to see how this is possible, or even what it means. Connections are noticed, procedures are grasped, subtle features are seen. But once seen, they can easily be shown to any sensible person, and are unlikely to be forgotten. They have a public character, so they are objectively demonstrable.

Is it objectively demonstrable that human life is sacred? Can it be shown to any rational person that human life is sacred? And if we did attempt to demonstrate this, would it be anything like demonstrating a geometrical proof or a voice mail retrieval sequence? If someone just doesn't see that the sacredness of life, as is widely the case today, are there certain things about life we could then point out to them, things they overlooked in the way one might overlook a scrolling bar on a monitor screen? Are there attributes of human life of which they are unaware, and to which we could point, allowing them to make the connections necessary for the proper inference?

In "Building a Culture of Life," Bishop McHugh at several places seems to suggest that the sacredness of life is an "objective truth," something that could be ren-

[6] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, New York: Vintage Books, 1991, pp. 288 f.

dered in "a clear and precise formula" that would allow anyone to see (pp. 2, 5, 13).[7] Supporting these suggestions are numerous passages in the papal encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*. Pope John Paul II invokes there the "obvious evidence of an objective and universal truth (¶19)," and maintains that the sanctity of life "can be recognized by everyone through the light of reason" (¶77). Although acknowledging that "faith provides special light and strength" to this insight, he nevertheless insists that "life certainly has a sacred and religious value, but in no way is that value a concern only of believers. The value at stake is one which every human being can grasp by the light of reason." (¶101)[8] But what about the host of those who don't see this objective truth, fail to grasp the sacredness of life through the light of reason?

John Paul II is by no means unaware of this blindness, and even implies that it gives rise to a certain darkness specific to our age. "Man is no longer able to see himself as 'mysteriously different' from other earthly creatures; he regards himself merely as one more living being, as an organism which, at most, has reached a very high stage of perfection."(22) But to what can we attribute such a widespread incapacity? What is the problem for those who don't see? If life is not just incidentally, but essentially sacred, how could something so obvious, so patent, be hidden from so many? If the sacredness of life is an objective truth, available to anyone through the light of human reason, then the only alternatives would be that those who do not see are either (a) mentally defective, (b) ignorant of the arguments, (c) suffer from the *akrasia* or moral blindness that Aristotle described, knowing the truth only as actors know their lines, or (d) willfully blind themselves to the truth, like the Holocaust deniers who wildly deny all the real evidence, while fabricating fantastic evidence of their own.

But none of these alternatives seems to fit those who deny the sacredness of life today. Far from (a) being mentally defective, some hold endowed chairs at prestigious universities, and rather than (b) being ignorant of the arguments, they know their details well enough to construct very rational refutations. (c) *Akrasia* might describe a pregnant woman who frantically overrides her conscience, or a man who knows suicide is deplorable even as he succumbs to despair, but it does not apply to those who simply deny that life is sacred in the first place. And in contrast to (d) refusing evidence, there is no empirical evidence John Paul II would likely submit that the deniers would likely challenge. Everything is patent for both sides. They simply see it differently.

Moreover, of those who do uphold the sacredness of life, how many do so consistently, adhering to the elevated standards that John Paul II upholds: that is, condemning not only abortion, euthanasia, and suicide but also maintaining this same insistence on the sacredness of life with respect to procreation, the death penalty, war, and poverty? Those in our society who adhere consistently to this standard are few. And of those who acknowledge the sacredness of life only selectively, can it be said that they really do see at all?

---

[7] Bishop James T. McHugh, "Building a Culture of Life: A Catholic Perspective," *Christian Bioethics*, 2001, Volume 7, No. 3, pp. 441–452.

[8] Pope John Paul II, The Gospel of Life, New York: New York Times Books, 1995.

3

How can the sacredness of life be shown to someone who just doesn't see? What would enable them to see, to open their eyes? This is, in part, a rhetorical question about what might be persuasive here. But it is also, in part, a heuristic question concerning what would allow individuals to make a certain kind of discovery. And if there turn out to be certain preconditions for seeing, then this would suggest that it is an epistemological question as well, a question about the grounds for our knowledge concerning the sacredness of life.

1. John Paul II says that human life is sacred.
2. Euclid says that a circle can be inscribed in an equilateral and equiangular pentagon (*Elements*, Book IV, Prop. 11)
3. The priest says that the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ.
4. The psalmist says that the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps 19:1).

re 4: If we don't see how it is that the heavens declare God's glory, the psalmist has a response that should help open our eyes. He points to the golden sun, rising from the end of the earth like a bridegroom emerging gloriously from his chamber, bringing with it both the speech of day and the knowledge of night, rejoicing like a powerful athlete running great circular laps far overhead, while yet leaving no nook hidden from its awesome heat (Ps 19: 2–6). The psalmist is not giving us new information about the sun, but helping us to see more, to see better, to see the sun as a visible image manifesting invisible things. What could be more patent than the sun overhead? Yet the psalm discloses it, helps us to see it more truly.

re 3: An objection could be made to the priest that the bread and wine look exactly the same, before and after they are consecrated. And a proper answer would be that the holy mysteries should not be a spectacle for unbelieving eyes in the first place, since to gaze in disbelief at holy things is to profane them. But it may be precisely this injunction that helps an outsider see, for seeing better here would not mean looking more closely, looking perhaps for some kind of perceptible glow, but rather in seeing how the proper sacramental attitudes of reverence and respect themselves help make manifest the presence of Christ. To those who want to see, the priest could properly point to the comportment of the communicants, how they cross themselves and kneel and kiss the chalice and kiss the hand that holds the chalice. He could relate how they prepared themselves for this communion with their Lord through confession and prayer and fasting, and he could tell of the precautions and restrictions that he must observe in dealing with them, or the restrictions on those who may partake of them. He could even point to the way in which reverence for these Eucharistic sacraments has surrounded them with beautiful and costly materials, although these are of less value than the faith which they express. Beyond this, seeing further would require becoming a believer, partaking of the sacraments, and thus seeing from inside the Eucharist itself.

The priest could also, of course, present metaphysical and theological arguments concerning transubstantiation or some alternative concept, leading the inquirer from

one inference to another. But would this help the inquirer see better, or would it instead further obscure his vision, make him look in the wrong direction? The actions, attitudes, and comportment of the worshipers toward the holy mysteries are a better way to help someone see from outside.[9]

re 2: Euclid's response to those who do not see consists in a "clear and precise" process of inferential reasoning, whereby the student is led from one step to the next. It is a perfectly objective process "which every human being can grasp by the light of reason," and people with normal mental capacities always do so.

re 1: John Paul II says that human life is sacred. What are his options for assisting those who do not see this?

(a) Given John Paul II's emphasis on "objective truth," "objective norms", "objective law," and "objective moral grounding"; his evocation of a rationality that holds not just for believers, but for every human being; and his appeal to a natural law that "despite the negative consequences of sin… can also be known in its essential traits by human reason" (¶ 29)—given all this, it would seem that somewhere in the encyclical, there should be a demonstration, more or less similar to those offered by Euclid, showing the various inferential steps required to see how life is sacred. But, of course, no such proof appears, nor is one likely to be forthcoming, and this seeming lacuna raises obvious questions—rhetorical, heuristic, and epistemological—about employing the discourse of objectivity, universality, natural law, and the light of reason. These latter are instruments of moral philosophy that can accomplish certain worldly things: they may perhaps show that it is more rational to forfeit my "natural" right to kill everyone than to be subject to the "natural" right of everyone else to kill me (vis-a-vis Hobbes), or that it is rationally inconsistent to lie and steal (vis-a-vis Kant), or that rational people would avoid planning a highly stratified society if they were ignorant beforehand of their situation within it (vis-a-vis Rawls). Is the "rationalistic" model (#2 above) helpful here at all? Can the tools of rationality show that life is sacred, or do they point in the wrong direction? What could show this, allow someone else to see it?

(b) The "outsider" model (#3 above) is more appropriate here, and its strength lies in showing how someone not holding the view that life is sacred might get an indication of what it would mean to do so. Seeing the actions, attitudes, and beliefs (regarding a wide range of sexual, mortal, and political matters) of someone who consistently upheld the belief that human life is "a sacred reality entrusted to us," (¶ 2) the outsider would not necessarily see that life is sacred, but at least see what it would mean to see that life is sacred—would see the sacredness of life not directly, but indirectly. Taking *"praxis"* in both the ancient sense as denoting actions which of themselves deserve praise or blame, as well as in the ascetical sense as referring to "the external aspect of the ascetical life

[9] For an example of how communion practices and beliefs aid in understanding the holy mysteries, see Ruiping Fan, "The Memoirs of a Pagan Sojourning in the Ruins of Christendom," *Christian Bioethics*, Volume 5, No. 3, pp. 232–237.

(namely, purification, fasting, vigils, *metanoias*, etc., and in general the keeping of the commandments) [which] is an indispensable aspect of seeing [*theōria*]," we could more aptly call this a "practical" model.[10] It invokes a truth to which Socrates appealed in his *apologia* to the Athenians, that what people regard as "great proofs" are "not words but what [they truly] esteem, deeds" (*Apology*, 32a). In this case, however, the "deeds"—the actions and attitudes that positively take account of human life as sacred—would be seen not primarily as indicative of the virtue of the doer, but as transitive, as passing over to their object: human life thereby made manifest to the outsider as sacred.

(c) But is there an insider model, one that clarifies what, and how, the person who sees human life as sacred sees? The "iconic" model (#4 above) offers just this. The psalmist helps us see in the great arc of the golden sun across the heavens, in its intense heat from which nothing can hide, and in its sovereignty over time itself, a visible image of invisible things. Like God's Law, the sun holds sway over all, and the sovereignty of the Law is as inescapable as the heat of the sun in the desert.[11] The invisible Law does not itself become visible in the sun; there is not some special feature of the sun (a penumbra, for example) to indicate to the careful observer the partial visibility of the Law in the sun. Rather, the visible sun itself, the sun in its very sunness, serves as an image of what is itself invisible. It is a visible icon, a window to the invisible, through which we can see what the Law is like, if in fact we are able to see: "Ever since the creation of the cosmos His everlasting power and divinity, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made." (Rom 1:20) In addition, this iconic model gives some approximation of the "inside" of the outsider model, showing how it is that the communicant himself sees the presence of Christ in the Holy Mysteries, not by inspecting the bread and wine for special visible features as an outsider might do, but by seeing in the selfsame bread and wine the preeminent way that Christ is "invisibly present with us."[12] That is, the interior of Eucharistic *praxis*, that to which the latter lends support while at the same time making visible indirectly to the outsider, consists in a kind of iconic seeing.

---

[10] Elder Joseph the Hesychast, *Monastic Wisdom: The Letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, Florence, AZ: St Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, 1998, p. 406.

[11] I am persuaded by C.S. Lewis, who holds that the sun of which the psalmist speaks is "not of course the mild heats of our climate, but the cloudless, blinding, tyrannous rays hammering the hill, searching every cranny." *Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 64.

[12] The Divine Liturgy of Our Father Among the Saints John Chrysostom, The Elevation.

4

What is seen when life is seen as sacred, and what is seen when it is seen as not being sacred? John Paul II, in the passage cited above, states succinctly what is seen in the secular vision of humanity: it sees human life "merely as one more living being," in contrast to seeing it "as 'mysteriously different' from other earthly creatures." What constitutes this mysterious difference that the secular vision overlooks or denies? In a second passage, cited in part by Bishop McHugh, John Paul II states that "man, although formed from the dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7, 3:19; Job 34:15; Ps 103:14; 104:29), is a manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory" (¶34). Human life, as it is stated throughout the encyclical, is a "living image" of the "living God," an "image of God's glory" (¶83, 84); it bears the "image and imprint" of God (¶39). "In every child which is born and in every person who lives or dies we see the image of God's glory. We celebrate this glory in every human being, a sign of the living God, an icon of Jesus Christ" (¶84). That is, human life is sacred in a way that other living things are not sacred, and this is due to the "mysterious difference" by which human life is radically iconic. Thus, it is iconic not in the general way that all visible creation, like the sun, serves as an image of its invisible creator, but rather in the special way that the consecrated bread and wine are iconic: they are not seen for what they are if their iconic nature is overlooked or denied.

But if it is the iconic character of human life—not just its being able to serve as an image of God, but its being created to be an image of God—that makes it sacred, two questions follow. First, can we further articulate this iconic nature of human life in order to better understand what this means, and thus know what is required in order to shelter and preserve this sacredness? And second, since to see an image *as* an image means to exercise a certain kind of seeing, what kind of seeing is involved here? For if we understand this, we will know what is required for preserving our ability to see.

1. With respect to the first of these questions, the encyclical is simply of two minds.

(a) On the one hand, it carries with it the baggage of a long tradition of scholastic and natural law teachings, which are evident in the emphasis on objectivity and rational judgment as the best means for seeing and securing the sanctity of human life. For example, the author of the Book of Sirach is quoted approvingly because he "sees as part of this image not only man's dominion over the world but also those spiritual faculties which are distinctively human, such as reason, discernment between good and evil, and free will" (¶ 34). And if it is our rational judgment that constitutes the divine image in ourselves, it stands to reason that it is what will allow us to see that image in others as well. But this view is fraught with difficulties:

(i) It raises immediately the problem of the status of human life which is waxing or waning, life which is not yet or no longer capable of rational

judgment, forcing a retreat to the ground of "potentiality" for rational judgment, degree of potentiality for rational judgment, and so forth.

(ii) With increasingly sophisticated studies of animal ethology, and increased appreciation of animal abilities, the distinction between human and non-human life begin to blur when our humanity is localized in certain capacities such as reason, free will, and the like, capacities which can all too easily be reduced to brain function. Indeed, the employment of criteria of this sort is just what has allowed "animal liberationist" Peter Singer to concern himself much with the conditions in which farm animals are raised, even while justifying human abortion, euthanasia, and early infanticide. He sees even-handed, rational judgments concerning respective brain functioning to be not only consistent, but the only way to avoid what he calls "speciesism."

(iii) But the use of localized criteria is inherently misleading, as well. It is said that St. Patrick used the three-lobed shamrock to teach the pagan Celts about the Holy Trinity. Is human life like this, iconic in a single specific feature, but otherwise just another leaf? Isn't human life as understood and experienced in traditional Christianity deeply, radically iconic, having as its very being that of an image? Is it not fundamentally mistaken to understand human life as iconic in only certain respects, which are somehow grafted on to an otherwise animal being? Isn't this similar to the misunderstanding of the Eucharistic imaging discussed above, whereby the change of certain visible aspects would be presumed to constitute the divine presence?

Does this mean that we should reject localized criteria altogether, and grant that the iconic nature of human life is essentially mysterious?

(b) This is precisely that other direction in which *The Gospel of Life* is turned. Indeed, the encyclical uses the word "mystery" far more often than the word "reason," evoking the mysteries of birth, of life, of suffering, and of death, as well as the mysteries of Redemption, of the Holy Trinity, of the Word of God. Is not God Himself above all mysterious, He upon whom we cannot even directly gaze without mediation? But if this is the case, then a being who was to serve as the image of God would have to be fundamentally mysterious as well, a being perhaps of whom it may even be said that mystery predominates. And indeed, it is above all at those nodal points at which human life is most vulnerable, and its sanctity needs to be most zealously safeguarded, that human life is closest to the mystery: in its birth, as it nears death, in its suffering. The encyclical itself warns us of losing "sight of the mystery of God, but also of the mystery of the world and the mystery of [our] own being," thereby reminding us that these three mysteries are closely intertwined. (¶ 23). Seen from this perspective, it is not in its rationality, but rather in the final surpassing of rationality, in its realization of its own inability to master and control and even comprehend its world with any finality, and thus in its deference to the mystery—i.e. in its humility—that human life is more visibly iconic, and thus more patently sacred.

2. But if the iconic, and thus sacred, nature of human life is best characterized through disclosing its relation to the mystery, how is this iconic character best seen? As argued above, there are two models from which we can draw, the practical model that is especially important in allowing outsiders to see, and the properly iconic seeing that is restricted to insiders.

Why don't they see? How is it possible to hear someone whom I respect and love and in many ways admire argue quite sincerely that we are really just another animal species, that the value of human life is incremental, and thus that abortion, suicide, and euthanasia are perfectly reasonable in certain circumstances? But we must be careful of getting blinded by the "light of reason" here, i.e. by the thought that the sacredness of life—taken in any sense which a traditional Christian would find meaningful—is so evident to reason that it must be patent in a straightforward and unproblematic way. For this is simply not the case, nor has it ever been an ordinary view. Instead, it is an extraordinary teaching which is, and has been, hidden from most people in most places and most times, including many philosophers of "natural law" who have not been Christians. However patent the sacredness of life might be to the believer, it is often almost entirely opaque to others, as in fact we should expect it to be if it has been correctly argued that the sacredness of life consists in its iconic character, and that the latter is only visible from within. For to see the image as an image is to exercise a double seeing, which here means to see "through" it to that mystery of which it is an image.

Why don't they see? Because from the outside, only the indirect, "practical" seeing is possible, and this seeing depends on those who are inside exhibiting their own ability to see (from within) the sacredness of life—in their life, actions, beliefs, attitudes, politics. This is why Christians have been instructed not to hide their light, not to put it beneath a basket, but rather allow their lives to provide the light for others to see the glory of God (Matt. 5: 14–16).

What, then, is seen from the inside? The mystery is what is seen, but seen iconically as alone it can be seen by our eyes, not directly. To see iconically is to see an image *as* an image, to see through it, as it were, while to take it as self-subsistent is to radically misunderstand what it is. To see ourselves and others and our lives in this iconic way is to see with the eyes of faith: to see our own lives as iconic is to see "the hidden action of grace" (¶2) within them, to see the workings of the mystery. But this kind of seeing is not something we can simply exercise at will. "All who commit themselves to following Christ are given the fullness of life: the divine image is restored, renewed and brought to perfection in them" (¶36). Seeing the workings of divine grace within the world, seeing the divine image in other people, seeing what is in fact patent, yet hidden due to our brokenness, requires inner transformation. "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3), a passage which the encyclical cites, adding that "to give this life is the real object of Jesus' mission" (¶37). Seeing in this most important sense is not like seeing the solution to a problem. It is more like having a great realization. It is more a matter of being changed, of having ones eyes opened, awakening, as this is described by Elder Zosima's younger brother. The iconic mystery is both easy and hard to see,

patent but hidden. This is what makes possible the existential comedy for which Kierkegaard had such a fine sense, and also makes it possible for us to look objectively for the mystery which in fact lies in the other direction.

5

The sacredness of life does not consist in a set of natural properties that qualify it for having that designation. All the properties put forward for this task can be seen as nothing more than the product of natural selection.

The sacredness of human life, that our truest being is to be as an image of God, is a hidden patency, seen but not seen—a patency that is *lived* (since each of us *is* most essentially that image) yet generally unnoticed.

To see this sacredness of life, one must assume it, be it, discover it within oneself. It is not empirically demonstrable, not objective, because it is not of this world. It is not based upon a fact, but upon an epiphany. It is an image of the mystery. In its highest, and thus most iconic, manifestation, it is nothing other than what St. Isaac of Syria called "the great compassion which is poured out beyond measure—after the likeness of God—in [the human] heart."

To see the image of God in others means to manifest ones own being as an image of God—i.e. it means to love others as God has loved us.

Chapter Three The Challenge of Secularism to Philosophical Ethics

Our symposium has had as its theme, “Ethics and the Challenges of Secularism.” The relevance of this topic for us today is twofold. Russia, of course, has only recently emerged from a long night of state-enforced secularism. Meanwhile America, or so many believe, may be inching ever more closely toward a similar or parallel condition of secularism—even if it is enforced less by state violence than by what was called yesterday “informal social sanctions.”

But what is secularism? Why is it problematic? And what are the challenges that it poses to ethics?

Charles Taylor’s recent weighty volume, *A Secular Age*, seems like a good place to begin answering these questions. According to Taylor, the secular character of our age comes from the weakening of perennial “bulwarks” against religious unbelief (for example, the conviction that nature is divinely ordered, and the beliefs that principles of moral and social order are rooted in divine order and supported by divine ordinance) and above all what Max Weber called the “disenchantment” of modern life—the loss of a sense of meaning embedded in the world around us that does not derive from our own making.

But if the loss of such things leads to secularism, its primary characteristic—its distinguishing feature—lies elsewhere: namely in the striking fact that whereas just a few centuries ago, un-belief was so uncommon as to require justification, today it is religious belief itself that requires explanation and justification. In short, secular-

This brief essay was presented as one of two concluding reflections to the conference, “Ethics and the Challenge of Secularism: Russian and Western Perspectives,” held May 25-26, 2012, at the University of Notre Dame. The conference, funded by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation, was sponsored by the Society of Christian Philosophers, the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Theological Commission of the Moscow Patriarchate, and hosted by the Center for Ethics and Culture and the Philosophy Department, University of Notre Dame. It was composed on site, without reference materials on hand, and it is reproduced here as written, with only minor modifications.

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_3

ity consists in the fact that, within contemporary discourse, *religious belief is optional* or purely elective.

So where does this optional status of religious belief leave ethics? If religious belief is just as discretionary as our choice of recreational activities (bowling versus downhill skiing) or beverages (beer versus wine) or novelists (Hemingway versus Joyce) then it cannot count as more than a personal preference. So we can't look to religion for ethical guidance at more than an individual level. We must look instead toward something that, by mutual agreement, we all do share if we are to find common ethical justifications. And what would that be?

Human nature, perhaps, understood as entailing sympathy or pity or sociability, and thus as an inner basis for moral action? But the writings first of Sade, and then of Nietzsche, show quite intentionally and rather powerfully, even if somewhat repugnantly, that our nature may just as well incline toward cruelty and domination as toward empathy and respect.

So we look instead to *reason*, which we are all supposed to share (even if it is in an emphatically modern, Western modality). Reason, it is hoped, can provide us with a universally applicable algorithm for generating moral judgments as they proceed either from their principle or from their consequences.

As for the former, the way of deontology, I will simply take Kant at his word that in practice, deontological principles ultimately depend upon religious presuppositions, i.e. upon certain "postulates of practical reason." And whether this dependence is explicit or implicit, there is good reason to think that he is correct, and thus that even rationally grounded moral precepts ultimately depend upon religious premises.

But what about consequences and a utilitarian calculus? I want to cite Peter Singer here, less as a *reductio ad absurdum* than as a harbinger of things to come. For what was just a few decades ago—in an only slightly more religious age—not just unspeakable, but unthinkable—i.e. not just abortion and euthanasia, but infanticide and bestiality—are with Singer given robust and unabashed advocacy. In view of this, and the fact that Singer's arguments are taken quite seriously by professional philosophers, can we really continue to believe that reason in its utilitarian mode can provide us with the foundation for a shared moral vision?

At this point, then, I want to join in agreement with those ethicists (such as H. Tristram Engelhardt) who argue that purely secular reason, unaided by religious intuition, can offer no foundation for ethics beyond the mere *principle of consent*. "I won't kill you (unless you request it) if you won't kill me (again, unless I want you to.)" And if you are unable to either render or withhold consent—unconscious or unborn or something of the sort—then you don't count.

But of course, we all have a richer, thicker set of ethical beliefs and perceptions and sensitivities than this! Yet where did we derive them, if not from reason? Surely many places, but let me suggest that the most important sources are religious belief and practice. Or rather, their residuals—for as Nietzsche saw, religion has a prolonged half-life, even as it decays and decomposes. Most of us share these residual elements, even as they fade. But they are not rationally grounded, nor can we publically invoke religious beliefs when they are now entirely optional and individual. For the most part, we smuggle them (unwittingly, covertly) into either deontological

or utilitarian arguments, and it is often precisely these assumed premises that end up making the more formal argumentation seem plausible in its conclusions.

But what happens as they fade more and more—when we no longer feel that life is sacred, or that hospitality to the other is central to human decency? Indeed, when like Nietzsche's *letzte Menschen,* we say: "Sacred?" "Decency?" And we smirk and snicker and blink. We can still appreciate a Sacred Cantata by Bach or a Requium Mass by Mozart, but only because we still are close enough to the religious beliefs of the past that we are able to remember, collectively remember, the doctrines and feelings upon which that music depends. But what happens as we become more distant from that shared memory—when we truly *forget*?

I want to suggest, then, that Peter Singer—Singer, and writers even more bold than him, such as those who call themselves "transhumanists"—that they may provide us with a glimpse of that future. And I want to further suggest that this glimpse is morally chilling.

Additionally, I want to further suggest that a striking range of philosophers hardly associated with theism—philosophers such as Derrida, Vattimo, Habermas, and Žižek, to name only a few—have been expressing the sense that if we are to remain fully human, the ethical and political spheres really may not be able to do without religious beliefs, even though these advocates are not themselves believers.

Therefore, I suggest that these are questions we would do well to consider more explicitly, if our symposium on "Ethics and the Challenge of Secularism" is to be thorough and faithful to its theme.

Chapter Four Reflections on Faith and Science

Every age has its priorities, based on its own sense of what is important, and dictating what will receive more discussion, acquire a more highly developed lexicon, and accrue more subtle and nuanced distinctions. For example, the greatest works of Ancient Greek philosophy (Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus) placed the highest emphasis on the life of the *nous* or higher intellect, even while certain other schools of natural philosophy (Leucippus, Democritus) had theories of atoms that by the standards of modern physics now seem rather crude. Atoms were seen as the indivisible or "uncuttable" building blocks of the material world—hard and impenetrable particles, resembling grains of sand on the beach. In contrast, the atomic theory of contemporary physics is far more sophisticated, populating the inventory of sub-atomic particles well beyond the simple photon-electron-neutron model of the early twentieth century to include six "flavors" of quarks, six types of leptons, and a twelve-member family of gauge bosons, not to mention composite particles such as baryons and mesons—all of which are conceptualized not as "particles" at all in any ordinary sense, but as "wave packets" whose boundaries cannot be precisely circumscribed. And this greater conceptual sophistication, of course, has resulted from our shared belief that knowledge of the material universe is of great importance—a belief that makes our modern age the best place to look, at least initially, for an accurate understanding of material reality.

But things are very different with regard to spiritual realities, which in the modern West tend to be either heavily discounted or denied altogether, i.e. seen as non-existent. And I fear that the modern distinction between faith and reason is a product of those same modern sensibilities, rendering it by comparison at least as crude and over-simplified as the atomic theory of pre-modern times now seems to us. For the ancient Greeks, for example, there are at least a dozen words pertaining to different kinds of knowledge, terms that may still sound familiar to our ears—words like *epistēmē* and *gnōsis* and *sophia*, *noēsis* and *theōria*, *dianoia* and *technē*, *phronēsis* and *logismos* and *aisthesis*. Likewise, the great Patristic thinkers of the early church saw rich and complex and subtle relations between faith and different kinds of

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_4

knowledge. And all of this gets reduced to something that is perhaps too clumsy to be of much use if we want to understand the relations between modern natural science and the Orthodox life of faith. For the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western Europe insisted that all legitimate knowledge consisted *only* in what the Greeks had called *dianoia*, what the Latins called *ratio*, and which we might call discursive rationality or as is more usual, simply "reason." So faith, in contrast, becomes *un*-reason, the irrational pitting itself against the rational, fundamentalist William Jennings Bryant insisting with red face and distended veins that the earth was only 6000 years old, over against evolutionist Clarence Darrow, calmly reasoning through the "facts" and mesmerizing the jury as he puffed on his cigar and smiled while the ash at the end just getting longer and longer—the result of his slyly inserting a straightened paper-clip into the middle. Blind faith. Versus "enlightened" (and clever) reason. Guess which one wins?

But St Maximus the Confessor criticizes the person whose lack of virtue has blinded what he calls "the eyes of faith," i.e. as he puts it, when we have "blinded in ourselves the divine eyes which had opened within us according to the measure of our faith," allowing "our faith to become blind and sightless because it is deprived of the Enlightenment of the Spirit."[1] And St Mark the Ascetic maintains that "he who does not know the truth cannot truly have faith; for by nature knowledge precedes faith."[2] Faith as presupposing knowledge? Blind faith as failed faith? Faith as not only perceptive and cognizant, but as enjoying a kind of enlightenment? How is this possible? Isn't faith a blind leap, a plunge into the darkness? Or we may consider St Isaac the Syrian, who *defines* faith as "that light which by grace dawns in the soul," making what he, like Maximus, calls "the eyes of faith" the medium by means of which "the luminous and noetic intellect" itself perceives the highest realities of which it is capable.[3] Here too, faith is a kind of seeing—indeed a higher seeing, a *noetic* seeing.

In the rich patristic literature discussing faith and knowledge, at least five different modes of knowledge are discernable. First, there is a kind of knowledge that runs counter to faith. As St Isaac argues, this kind of knowledge is bound up with the body and material things, and thus it is motivated by fear, for considered as bodily creatures, human beings are quite vulnerable. Consequently, it seeks to master nature—a never-ending task, becoming more ever obsessive and progressively more fearful: the more it seems to succeed in finding material security, the more vulnerabilities it exposes. It is anxious of its shortcomings, while it is vain and proud concerning its achievements.[4]

---

[1] *The Philokalia*, *Volume Two,* ed. St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth, Tr. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, London: Faber & Faber, 1981, p. 220.

[2] *The Philokalia,* ed. St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth, Volume One, Tr. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, London: Faber & Faber, 1979, p. 118.

[3] St Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies of St Isaac the Syrian*, tr. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984, p. 262f.

[4] Ibid., pp. 258ff.

There is also, however, a *second* way of knowing nature, one that is not concerned with seeking an ever-elusive material security, but with discerning the presence of the invisible within the visible, the creator within creation. This second kind of knowledge, St Isaac maintains, serves faith as its "predecessor," and it is especially characterized by the human ability to discern good and evil, an ability that leads it to faith in a transcendent creator. St Isaac calls this "natural knowledge" and notes that "the power of nature attests that it behooves man to believe in Him who brings forth all things in His creation."[5] He argues that it is "implanted " in us by God, but that "we veil this natural knowledge by means of our pleasure-loving will." For St Maximus the Confessor, this knowledge is concerned with seeing God throughout creation: "he who does not limit his perception of the nature of visible things to what his senses alone can observe, but wisely with his intellect [*nous*] searches after the meaning [*logos*] which lies within every creature, learns who is the Cause of their being."[6]

Thirdly, there is a mode of knowledge that is proper to faith itself. It is a practical kind of knowledge, according to St Isaac: the *praxis* of prayer, fasting, acts of mercy, struggling with the passions, the reading of Holy Scripture, and perfecting the virtues. Building upon the knowledge of God in creation acquired in the second mode of knowledge, the soul now seek to get closer to the creator, and in the process of the actions for which this goal calls, it discovers that it is buoyed up and assisted and led by the grace of the Holy Spirit. "This knowledge," says St Isaac, "makes straight the pathways in the heart which lead to faith," as it finds itself "raised up" by Christ Himself into "all the various excellences seen in the soul and the wondrous means that are employed for serving in Christ's court."[7]

This third kind of knowledge, in turn, leads to a full and rich faith, which now counts as what the Epistle to the Hebrews calls the very "subsistence [*hypostasis*] of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) Such faith is thus itself a fourth kind of knowledge, the highest of the four, in which "faith itself swallows up knowledge, converts it, and begets it anew." "Then," continuing with the words of St Isaac of Syria, "it can soar on wings in the realms of the bodiless and touch the depths of the unfathomable sea, musing upon the wondrous and divine workings of God's governance of noetic and corporeal creatures."[8] It also allows for the fullness of what St Maximus calls *theōria physikē*, the contemplative or noetic understanding of nature, a deepening of the "natural knowledge" mentioned earlier.

Finally, we must add a fifth relation between faith and knowledge, one described by St Maximus, in which "faith is a relational power or a relationship which brings about the immediate, perfect and supernatural union of the believer with the God in whom he believes."[9] That is, here faith becomes the kind of knowledge proper to the

---

[5] Ibid., pp. 226ff.

[6] *Philokalia*, Volume Two, p. 189, translation modified.

[7] *Ascetical Homilies*, p. 260.

[8] Ibid., p. 261.

[9] *Philokalia*, Volume Two, p. 189.

mystical union with God that Orthodox theology calls *theōsis* or divinization, the possibility of becoming divine not by nature but by grace.

But although this might seem a bit complicated, it in fact represents an enormous simplification of far more complex matters treated with great subtlety by the ancient Church. And it is surely much less complex than would be an explanation of particle physics to an ancient Greek philosopher of the Epicurean school. But most importantly, I think these categories can provide us with a useful approach to certain questions of faith and knowledge that are of great urgency today. Specifically, I want to pose two questions. First, with which of these five categories can the knowledge sought by the modern natural sciences be identified? And second, a question central to the philosophy of the natural environment: what light does this analysis of human knowledge cast upon current environmental problems, both with regard to understanding their etiology (how they came into being) and also concerning a prescription for how we might resolve them?

So, first, what kind of knowledge is developed in modern natural science? The most obvious answer would be the first kind, the one that pursues the mastery of creation in order to secure our physical well-being. But we moderns will proceed here uneasily, for St Isaac is not kind to this sort of knowledge:

> When knowledge cleaves to the love of body, it gathers up the following provisions: wealth, vainglory, adornment, rest of the body, assiduity in natural wisdom, such as is suitable for the governance of the world and which gushes forth the novelties of inventions, the arts, sciences, and all other things which crown the body in this visible world. …This is called shallow knowledge, for it is naked of all concern for God. And because it is dominated by the body, it introduces into the mind an irrational impotence, and its concern is totally for this world. This measure of knowledge does not reckon that there is any noetic power or hidden steersman over a man, nor any Divine care that shelters and takes concern for him. It takes no account of God's providential governance; but on the contrary, it attributes to a man's diligence and his methods every good thing in him, his rescue from what harms him, and his natural ability to avert the plights and many adversities that secretly and manifestly accompany our nature. This degree of knowledge presumes that all things are by its own providence, like those men who assert that there is not Divine governance of visible things. Nevertheless, it cannot be without continual cares and fears for the body.[10]

This characterization is, of course, rather unsettling. For despite its harsh tone, it seems to be a rather accurate characterization of the sciences today. They have achieved their success precisely by setting aside or bracketing any possible indication of divine activity in the world—any indication of purpose or design, and even less what Aristotle called *teloi* or "final causes"—and this success, in turn, has itself been measured by their ability to provide us with better conditions for our bodily sustenance. Modern natural science has assumed the character of a *methodological* atheism, i.e. it proceeds with the methodological assumption that all natural events must have a purely natural cause, discernable by science either now or in some future development of the respective science. Indeed, this characterization of science as taking no account of divine agency in creation is far better suited to the science of our own time than to the science of earlier ages—for example, either the

[10] *Ascetical Homilies*, pp. 258f.

Ptolemaic astronomy of St Isaac's own era (which by contemplating the eternal motion of divine and heavenly things, sought to "[make] its followers lovers of that divine beauty") or even the Newtonian astronomy of early modernity, in which space is understood to be "the sensorium of God," both of which now seem very remote from the standard science of our own time.

But let's pursue this question a bit further. What is wrong with pursuing a purely secular knowledge that does not take account of any divine agency? Might this not even be a positive virtue? For example, if I am taking my daughter's car into the repair shop for a safety inspection, do I really want to hear the mechanic qualify his assessment by remarking to me: "of course, we both have faith that God will be watching over her while she drives"? Wouldn't I prefer to have the car checked *as if* it were entirely up to us to make sure the car will be safe? Doesn't anything else invite a substitution of wishful thinking for responsibility and accountability? And isn't what I want from the mechanic an objective evaluation that leaves the religious faith to me, after the fact, once I have gotten the accurate report?

There are, of course, many questions we might want to pursue here. And I will add that the automobile mechanic upon whom I most rely is a fellow parishioner in whom I have *more* confidence due to our shared faith, rather than less. But of course, science for our society is not auto mechanics. It is rather a world-view. It offers more than "know-how," purely practical knowledge, presenting instead what most of us regard as the most legitimate knowledge. *Real* knowledge. If you doubt this, consider who might be called to testify before some congressional committee in Washington on an important issue. Will it be a poet? A philosopher? A theologian? Almost certainly, it will be a scientist. Science is, for us today, what the German philosopher Heidegger called "the theory of the real." And I think this is where St Isaac's provocative remarks begin to make us uncomfortable. For if (a) science counts for us as the highest and best kind of knowledge, and indeed as perhaps the *only* legitimate knowledge, and (b) if science is methodologically, i.e. by definition, god-less and faith-less, then (c) have we not unwittingly (or perhaps quite intentionally) embraced truth itself as god-less and faithless?

But what about the second category of knowledge that we have drawn from the patristic writings? Can't science also serve as a "natural knowledge" that is in fact a precursor or antecedent to faith, that leads up to religious faith? Are there not, for example, even today many scientists who testify that science in fact strengthens and reinforces their faith? Certainly there are. But for every scientist who commends science as leading to God, there will be at least two others stating just as emphatically just the opposite, that science proves there is no God and that believers are gullible, superstitious, or worse. It would seem that these opposing extrapolations from scientific findings cancel each other out, giving a zero net gain. And of course, both ways of using science subtly reinforce the belief that science is the knowledge that really counts, and hence the most powerful ally that one can solicit, leading us right back to the dilemma we just sought to avoid, i.e. making what appears to be an inherently faith-less knowledge the standard and epitome of all knowledge.

But aren't there alternative sciences, for example the Islamic science of which S.H. Nasr writes compellingly, or the system of Chinese medicine that, if not theistic, certainly encourages values that seem more compatible with religious faith? Don't these suggest that we could construct a science that is not "value free," but that instead reinforces higher values and higher truths? I think the answer here is a qualified yes, but I must hasten to add that the science we *do* have is moving in precisely the opposite direction. I see no reason why some future science could not build upon the insights and even much of the methodology of today's natural science without building a firewall between itself and religious faith. I leave this to scientists and thinkers of the future, to begin work on this task. But meanwhile, the science we have is the one that exists today, and I think that to solicit support from its quarters may be to make a dubious alliance, one that is likely to backfire, just as did the medieval appropriation of Ptolemy against Galileo.

But aren't there modes of "natural knowledge," to use St Isaac's term, other than science proper. Indeed there are. One of them is just the discernment of good and evil in daily life that he finds so valuable as a propaedeutic to faith. And another is the intuitive grasp of the eternal within the visible and temporal. But it is unclear at the moment how they could relate to science except as an "add-on," a tenuous extrapolation, so I want to defer their discussion to a bit later.

So we move on to consider the third kind of knowledge, the one that is practical and consists in acts of religious practice such as fasting, prayer, struggle against the passions, and so on which allow one, in his or her own life experience, to discover the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. This would seem an even more unlikely place to situate modern science, until we remember the vast array of the behavioral sciences, with their myriad claims to what would have once been called "inner knowledge." But here too, there is a systematic exclusion of religious truth-claims and any belief in divine agency within the self. Worse yet, there is an effort to incorporate (often surreptitiously) strange gods, such as the flirtation with Gnostic theurgy in Jung's archetypal psychology or the infiltration of counseling therapies with New Age thought and sensibilities. Yet there is hope to be found here too, since some of the best contemporary Orthodox theologians are conceptualizing Orthodoxy itself therapeutically, seeing it as based upon a patristic science of the soul, and finding in it remarkable similarities with the findings of cognitive therapy, even while going far beyond it. The writings of John Romanides and Hierotheos Vlachos and Alexis Trader, each of them either priests or hieromonks or bishops, all point in this direction. I personally find this a promising direction, but time will tell whether it influences mainstream thought significantly. And it is unclear how it could be extended into other sciences such as economics or sociology or anthropology.

And since the fifth category of knowledge in the patristic canon that we have been employing would be clearly resistant to scientific inquiry, i.e. *theosis* or mystical union with God, this leaves us with the fourth mode of knowledge, the knowledge that actually proceeds from faith, that presupposes it. But how could science have anything to do with this kind of knowledge? Mustn't science carry on without presuppositions of any kind, at least with regard to individual religious faith? And

what, after all, is this fourth kind of knowledge, which sounds to the modern mind suspiciously mystical?

Here it may not be inappropriate to interject something of my own path of inquiry, both in my philosophical research and in my own path of faith, and in the process at least suggest some of the ways that all this might have a bearing on environmental issues, as I promised earlier. When I discovered Orthodoxy some twenty years ago, I had just completed a progression in my own philosophical thought from an initial recognition that environmental ethics, as it was then conceived, was too narrow to deal with the realities facing us, and then to realizations first that environmental ethics had to incorporate an environmental aesthetics, and second that the aesthetics of nature always ended up in an essentially theological dimension. I saw this with figures such as Thoreau and Emerson, with Wordsworth and earlier with Thomas Traherne, and in the twentieth century with figures such as Annie Dillard and above all John Muir, who was truly the founder of modern environmentalism. All of them saw the value of nature as focused in a kind of beauty that could only be called numinous or, to use the more traditional term, "holy." And often, these insights followed a degree of asceticism that to some degree paralleled the practices of Orthodox monastics: Thoreau living self-sufficiently at Walden Pond, Muir wandering the Sierras with just a loaf of bread in his backpack, Annie Dillard in her cabin at Tinker Creek. That is, I realized that the foundations of modern environmentalism to a large extent lay not in developments of the science of ecology—which did not exist as a formal scientific field until much later, in the mid-twentieth century—but in a movement that was more properly spiritual than conceptual.

Meanwhile, as I began to read widely in Orthodox literature, I found that many of the same insights that I found in these figures were already present, usually in much more articulate form, in the great figures of the Church from Saints Paisios and Porphyrios and Elder Aimilianos in the present, and extending all the way back to the Cappadocian Fathers of the fourth century. Increasingly, I saw that here was something at least akin to what the ancient Greeks called *theōria* and the Latins called *contemplatio*. It is akin to what lies at the top of Plato's divided line and outside the cave in his famous allegory, what counts as the highest knowledge both for Aristotle and for Neoplatonism as well. But remarkably, the early Church had seen that this *theōria physikē*, this contemplation of nature, was best exercised not by cultured elites wearing the toga of the philosopher, but by Christian believers who had undergone a purification (*katharsis*) of the soul, i.e. had worked through the very *praxis* we characterized earlier as the third kind of knowledge. Could it be, I began to wonder, that in light of the increasing distance between science and spirituality in the modern world that certain individuals, many of them poets and artists, had begun to rediscover in the West what Orthodox monastics had always known—that we could best understand the mysteries of nature not through ever more sophisticated methodologies, but through purification of the soul and inner transformation?

So, certain questions arise here: if this is the case—if there is a higher knowledge than science, a noetic or contemplative knowledge that I suggest all of us have at

least glimpsed to one extent or another—shouldn't this higher knowledge guide not just the uses we make of science, but the way we contextualize and appropriate its conclusions? Shouldn't it serve not just as a supplement to science, but as a higher vision that reassures us in the face of the uncertainties and anxieties that purely secular thought always engenders? And therefore, might not the environmental crisis itself come from divorcing scientific knowledge, and its applications, from a higher mode of knowledge, a necessary consequence of the Enlightenment's refusal to acknowledge contemplative knowledge as legitimate knowledge at all? For once again, the modern West has turned its back upon what virtually all of humanity, and certainly the Christian tradition, has regarded as the highest and most important mode of knowledge, one that is prefigured in the second category of what St Isaac calls "natural knowledge," but that is deepened and perfected only in the fourth mode of knowledge, that proceeds from the *praxis* of faith to higher and more ultimate truths?

But in a pluralistic society, the question must arise: which faith? Certainly not the superficialities of New Age sentimentality, nor the boutique Buddhism that has gone feral on American college campuses, and that rarely engages itself with any serious kind of practice. Orthodox Christians will know, with some degree of explicitness or another, that the ancient faith of the Church—with its science of the soul, its healing and transformation—is the only reliable guide here. But we cannot expect to make this point successfully in a secular society, or in dialogue with a profoundly secular scientific community, unless our own lived experience of faith is authentic and energetic enough to guide us to insights that have the power to persuade and convince. And this, of course, is up to the willingness of the Orthodox Church to energetically engage modern society—and thus too, up to each one of us, personally.

Part II
Nature and the Holy

The dichotomies through which Western thought has come to confine itself within a prison of immanence are challenged more radically here, and the incursions have become less suggestive and more resolute. The section begins with philosophical autobiography, tracing some of the more overt features of a kind of journey that is inherently enigmatic. It is not only a journey from Western Christianity to its abandonment, and ultimately to a discovery of the Orthodox faith, but also a journey of philosophical discovery that resulted in a certain boldness to speak about matters of environmental philosophy in way that would have once seemed off limits, if not altogether beyond the pale—and thus it is an excursion of what is conventionally considered personal into the world of public discourse. That is, it narrates an incursion from the visible into the invisible, or more accurately an incursion into my own life and thought of what is holy and boundless. Chapter Six examines the question of whether contemporary Byzantine thought has itself successfully appropriated its own legacy in understanding the natural world. Chapter Seven poses serious concerns about the concept of Sophia, as it was developed in Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while emphasizing the importance of the concerns which that topic seeks to address. And the Chapter Eight pushes further, calling into question the very concepts of nature and environment, urging that *ktisis* or creation is far more adequate for understanding heaven and earth than either concept. The issues discussed in this section should not be seen as of interest solely or even primarily to certain professionals called "environmental philosophers," since they quickly open up into our very understanding of the order of creation as it has been given us by the Creator. And it belongs to the argument of this section that this understanding retrieved from ancient times is more sound than the views of modernity with all its "advances" in understanding the natural world—that is, that what we have to learn about the order of creation from the Psalmist is more important, and more essential, than what we stand to learn from the scientist, however

useful and beneficial this latter kind of knowledge may be. Finally, the Chapter Nine explores the connection between metaphysics and epistemology, along with the role of asceticism or spiritual discipline, in understanding the natural environment.

Chapter Five Toward the Mystery: Becoming an Orthodox Philosopher

Lead us up beyond both unknowing and light itself,
up to the farthest, highest peak
of mystical words,
where the mysteries of God's Word
lie simple, absolute, and changeless
in the luminous darkness of a hidden silence.
Amid deepest darkness
they pour overwhelming light
on what is most manifest.
Amid the wholly impalpable and unseen
they completely fill our eyeless minds
with glories beyond all beauty.

St Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, PG 3, 997 a–b.[1]

Why look to Orthodox philosophers for narratives of their spiritual journeys? Is there something especially noteworthy about the religious seekings of a philosopher? Surely philosophers are more likely to reflect on the process, making them likely to have more to say about it than most. Yet this pensiveness may derive not only from the spirit of impartial inquiry, but just as much from stubbornness or indecision or a fear of falling into error so strong that it overrides the love of truth itself.[2] Or perhaps it is assumed that philosophers, reputedly more rational and less passion-driven than most, would therefore have something unusually instructive to say about religious matters? But is philosophical rationality really the best vehicle for either finding, or elucidating, religious truth?

However, I think there may be better reasons for thinking that philosophers might have something to say here. For it has seemed to me for some time, certainly long

Thanks are due to Fr Alexios, Emilie, Mary Kay, Fr Michael, Paul, and Peter for many kind and helpful comments and suggestions on this essay, whose errors and infelicities remain my own.

[1] *The Mystical Theology*, in Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, tr. Colm Luibheid, (New York: 1987) Paulist Press, p. 135. Translation altered.

[2] On the distinction, and tension, between the will to find the truth and the will to avoid error, see William James' classic, "The Will to Believe," reprinted in numerous editions.

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_5

before I discovered Orthodoxy, that Western philosophy has itself possessed, right from its beginnings, a distinctly religious *telos*, an inner sense that its end must lie in some kind of salvation.[3] Moreover, as I now also believe, the truly decisive question for philosophy is really not whether such a horizon is assumed, but whether the salvation proper to it is to be found in the sterile composure of a rationality that is self-possessed and sure of itself—having decided that the light of divinity is nothing more than the clarity of its own reasoning—or whether it must be completed in a self-transcending movement toward and into something higher, an element within which philosophy itself would find both its fulfillment and its supercession. While Epicurus and Kant might serve as examples of the former, their balanced rationality enabling them to hover calmly above any religious dynamism, Plotinus is perhaps an exemplar of the latter, as are Kierkegaard and Nietzsche too, although in rather different manners.

But so many of them can be understood in both ways…. Even Socrates, as the Middle Academy demonstrated, can be understood not as a genuine seeker but as a rationalistic skeptic. Plato too, is commonly read as either rationalist or mystic. And, especially, Spinoza. Was he the "god-intoxicated" philosopher that some hold him to have been? Or was he really a materialist and atheist, the vanguard figure of Radical Enlightenment unbelief, as others (more rightly, I think) have maintained? And how could this be the case, that some of the most important philosophers (Kant included) remain the subject of vigorous debate over whether they were ultimately philosophical theologians or sophisticated atheists? How could it be so difficult to discern the difference, unless philosophy itself necessarily harbors an ambiguity and a powerful risk of self-deception—runs the risk of what the Orthodox ascetic tradition has termed *plani* (in Greek) or *prelest* (in Russian), the self-delusion that allows one to take pride in spiritual progress to the same degree that advances are made in precisely the wrong direction? And if philosophy as such is indicative of Western thought as a whole—for indeed, did it not spawn all the other fields of intellectual inquiry?—wouldn't both these factors—the inner orientation of philosophy toward religious truth, and its inherent dangers of getting lost, of *plani*—be of special interest in the task of understanding who, and where, we all are?

Philosophy among the ancient Greeks begins when a number of exceptionally insightful figures wake up to find themselves situated within a rather untidy and incoherent religious tradition, one possessing a certain mythic power, but lacking the spiritual depth and intellectual cogency to be found in other ancient traditions such as the Hebraic or the Vedic. And they sought by means of philosophy what Greek religion failed to offer on its own terms. Seeking a hidden *Logos* running through the seemingly endless *logoi*—both *logoi* of the street and *logoi* of the poets and sages—or seeking a deeper Unity within the bewildering multiplicity of events as they slipped away (Heraclitus, Parmenides). Seeking self-understanding and genuine goodness within a sophisticated cityscape where both had come to seem ephemeral and unreal (Socrates). And always pursued amidst the swirl of divine

[3] This thesis is developed persuasively by Pierre Hadot, especially in *What Is Ancient Philosophy*? and *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

stories that had come to seem like mere fables, fit only to entertain the young and anaesthetize the old. Perhaps the Hellenic religious traditions had once been vigorous and energizing, but philosophy proper began somewhere well past their shelf life. Certainly the early Church Fathers saw the philosophical quest as an inherently religious one, even if they saw it as a story with a surprise ending. Ancient Christianity itself was seen as the genuine fulfillment of philosophical tasks and aporias that could never have been resolved on their own terms, since it had been granted the revelation that Truth was not a static reality, resting within its own eternity, to be approximated through correct assertions, but a Person, who could be known only within a transformative relation that required of philosophy itself a self-divestment. As it was put by St Gregory Palamas, "profane philosophy existed as an aid to this natural wisdom before the advent of Him who came to recall the soul to its ancient beauty."[4]

Did Socrates not sense this latter kind of *telos* all along? Count upon it, even as he sought it? This question in relation to Socrates is, of course, ultimately imponderable, but certainly this was the case in my own philosophical strivings—the sense that as I approached the truth, the current mode of my own inquiry would eventually have to be left behind, since the task of philosophy had a religious end that thinking could neither determine nor contain. Or rather, that the mode of inquiry was itself a temporary vehicle, something to get me to the other side. But of course, the temptation is always to defer disembarking, settling instead for endless discourse about boats, perhaps even before setting out and instead of setting out. And however many times I have succumbed to this temptation—thinking about thinking, or thinking about what other people are thinking about thinking—I have always come back to the sense that thought itself is properly a vehicle, a boat that is far less interesting or important than the destination; and if it is kayak or a dinghy rather than a yacht, this is better because it makes it more evident that the boat itself is not the main thing. So, long before I had come across readings by any philosophers, I used to think a lot about the world—mostly about nature, for which I had a deep and passionate love, growing up on a farm with lovely woods and hedges, and a gentle, spring-fed river coursing along its sandy banks right through the middle of it all. And I never had any doubt that this proto-thinking, hardly rational at all, was really just a vehicle to get closer to the beautiful, natural world all around me. Or rather, to what it was that made that nature so beautiful and adorable. For it seemed to be inhabited and animated by a mystery that I found both joyous and frightening, and thus altogether compelling.

---

[4] St Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, tr. Nicholas Gendle, (New York: 1983) Paulist Press, p. 30.

I

Sartre maintained that narratives falsify. For as he argues, the sense of narrative movement from some discrete beginning through its gradual development in the story of, say, a journey, necessarily imports retrospective elements, within the process of recollection, that could not have been present while it was originally lived. His claims here are, in turn, a particular development of a key theme from Heidegger, that far from being "over and done with," the past is malleable, always holding possibilities that can newly emerge, retrieved against the background of future horizons. Both views, however, themselves interject an element of skepticism into our understanding of the narrative as disclosing a certain kind of truth. The same phenomena of recollection, however, were interpreted in a very different direction by the Russian philosopher Pavel Florensky— contemporary of both Heidegger and Sartre, but so far as we know, reader of neither—who saw an element of the eternal as embedded in every experience—each experience representing in its most essential dimension an encounter with the eternal.[5] Thus, not only could this inner kernel—perhaps inconspicuous or even imperceptible at the time—be retrieved. It was, rather, the one element of experience that *could* be retrieved, for the remainder was by definition transitory. And so it is that I return often to certain experiences, or certain elements of certain kinds of experience, that have become important to me, no doubt in some shifting proportion of edification and delusion. And especially now, in these reflections, such moments (and so many others) emerge as pointing and inclining toward the mystery of the Living God Who has revealed Himself, not just within a universal *Heilsgeschichte* or history of salvation, but to me—within my own history. But I would not wish for the reader to conclude from this that I consider myself as a "mystic" in some aerial or elevated or exceptional sense, or even in the diluted sense once common in the notion of "nature mysticism." Rather, I believe that everyone has glimpses of the mysterious or the "mystical" in some number or other, in some intensity or other, acknowledged or unacknowledged. (Nor, it must be added, do I assume that everything resembling this profile is of a salutary character, for in fact I think just the contrary, that sometimes we can catch glimpses of dark elements that very much need to be left alone, and moreover that the task of discerning between darkness and light is of great importance—especially in view of the growing prevalence of New Age beliefs and activities today, both in America and in Europe.)

---

[5] Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, tr. Boris Jakim, (Princeton: 1997) Princeton University Pr., pp. 148ff. "Memory is the activity of assimilation in thought… of that which is revealed by mystical experience in Eternity, or, in other words, the creation in Time of symbols of Eternity. We 'remember' not psychological elements but mystical ones, for psychological elements are psychological precisely because they occur in Time and flow away irretrievably with Time. … But one can touch once again the once-already-experienced time-transcending mystical reality that lay at the base of a single representation… Memory always has a transcendental significance, and in it we cannot fail to see our supratemporal nature."

William James, I think, makes claims similar to these in the earlier parts of the chapter on “Mysticism” in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and from them he concludes that the experiences of the great mystics are by no means altogether alien to any of us, however much we may have forgotten the analogues and anticipations in our own experience. Thus, I feel that I was fortunate to spend a great deal of time in the country, and a great deal of time alone and free from the distractions that might have made me fail to notice these moments very much. And I wonder, too, whether I may simply put more stock in them, perhaps cling to them more fondly or savor them more avidly than most—and I suspect for this reason that I have made a certain effort to remain open to them in my adult life, perhaps in a way that is unusual. For I believe that they are pointers, these times when the world or some aspect of it glistens and glows, sometimes faintly and sometimes quite engagingly—indicators of a transcendence without which life would not really be worth living. Believing that Florensky is correct here, and looking back on the path upon which I believe that God led me (with heels dragging along the way) into a living relation with His own eternity, I hope that it may be forgivable to attend to what persists for me as in some sense eternal elements within certain experiences, especially as they have lead me to the great Event of my life: toward a triple immersion in the cool waters of the Gulf of Mexico, on St Barbara’s Day, in the last month of the millennium, December 4, 1999.

II

Happily, then, I was raised as a country kid, spending long days working in the fields, or hunting along the river, or tramping through the woods, freely drawn by the mystery that shone through at odd and special moments. I was also raised as a Presbyterian, in a small-town Kansas church that still retained an austere aura of Calvinist reverence, and within this ambience a similar, perhaps closely related, and perhaps even identical mystery showed itself from time to time. Certainly both sorts, those in nature and those that took place “in church,” seemed related at the time. For strange as it may sound, the elusive, churchly epiphanies also invariably seemed like they were addressed to me alone, just as much as the mystery that beckoned from the edge of the forest, as something I would have never expected anyone else to have noticed—and also as something incidental, almost superadded, bearing no special connection to the fact that the venue happened to be a church building. Rather the mystery waxed and waned with the ebb and flow of moments, much as it did in the realm of nature outside—something glimpsed within a cool, dark corner of the church basement in the same way that something showed itself within the opaque pastel hues of a far-off thunderhead cloud in the late afternoon. There was nothing even remotely sacramental about the church or its services; yet the reverence for which it seemed to call was conducive, for me at least, to noticing a certain presence now and then, a quiet awareness that I always kept to myself. Except for the stirring Doxology, I found much of the music depressing and in rather bad taste.

And the faded, feminized pictures of Jesus posted around the Sunday school rooms seemed grotesque and disturbing to me, inducing a vague sense of unease and menace. But worse yet, the words that I heard spoken seemed altogether artificial, although not really in a way that made me feel indignant. Rather, it seemed like a routine part of some rite of passage that required learning how to talk in certain affected ways, part of the process of growing up and becoming a respectable person—for this was a farm community in the 1950s, a place and time where respectable people—people who stayed out of jail—simply did go to church. But the thought that words like "faith" and "grace" had any real referents, actually signified anything real, never occurred to me at all, nor was this to be the case until I discovered Orthodoxy. It just seemed like an empty, formal way of speaking that one needed to learn, without it being at all clear why.

If I didn't find the mystery in the music of church, I sensed a bit of it in some of the gritty blues and folk music I was able to hear on a faraway radio station in Chicago, a station that late at night could be received on an old shortwave radio in my bedroom. But more than this, as I entered high school, I was starting to find it in philosophy. Somehow, even in a little farm village, I was able to get hold of some philosophical literature, and in Goethe and Kant, in Kierkegaard and Buber and Heidegger, I felt that this same mystery circulated, although no less elusively than in the other places I had met up with it. Still, it fascinated me, even if here too, I never mentioned it to anyone. For who would have been interested? Who would have known? And what were the words with which I would even have discussed such things? Yet I remember as well endless, late-night conversations with friends in high school and then college—endless because they were always circling around something I could not put into words.

Still, despite its ineffable character and its often rather liminal status, this sense of wonder was altogether central to my life. And once, it seemed to have finally found a home, a safe harbor or anchorage, when rather incidentally I was invited out one summer to a Young Life camp in the high country of central Colorado, a region I already knew and loved from family vacations. And here, looking out from the mountains of the Front Range at muted, pulsating lightening flashes within distant thunderheads, rising up far out over the plains of Eastern Colorado, my heart was powerfully moved in a way that seemed to corresponded to what was supposed to happen here anyway, i.e. in the evangelical language of the Young Life movement, I was "born again" and "accepted Jesus into my heart," although to me at the time it would have been better described as a more explicit sense of embracing, and being embraced by, the mystery that had long been the unspecifiable locus of my longing. Certainly it filled me with the joy that had come and gone rather fleetingly throughout my life. And I want to emphasize that I have never had reason to doubt that here, much more explicitly than before, although with an unclear understanding of what was happening, I had been addressed by the face of Christ, even though this took place within a milieu that would have neither valued, nor even permitted, an actual icon of Christ. And if the question would have been posed to me, I don't think I would have hesitated to say, "Yes, this is somehow the same face that had looked out

at me from the woods and the river bank and the clouds gathering in the distance. It is the very same face!"

I returned home a new "Christian," and set about clearing a corner in my parents' basement for morning prayer and Bible study, appropriately enough inside the reinforced tornado shelter that was *de rigueur* for sensible Kansas homes. But it all quickly began to seem rather unreal, bearing little relation to what went on in church back home, and having an equally phantom relation to my dealings with friends and family, with whom it seemed to me to make no more sense to discuss such things than to discuss the elusive "inklings" and "sightings" that had always meant so much to me. How could this seedling faith have survived, with no theological roots, no liturgical expression, no community of belief, and no ascetic practice to lead it past the stage of "first love"? I tried once to discuss this with the minister of our little congregation—a Pennsylvania coal miner, who had felt a calling to the ministry late in life, a noble and gently severe man, with erratic theological views—and he told me that I was not supposed to pray to Christ, as had now started to become dear to me, but only to "God," making it puzzling in hindsight exactly who he thought Christ Himself was. So disappointed, I did not repeat either experiment—praying by Name to Christ, or asking my minister for more spiritual advice. Certainly I felt even less inclined to reveal my mystical moments in nature or elsewhere, even though once, as the two of us drove home from a youth meeting of the presbytery, sitting a few feet apart in the front seat, the late afternoon glow on the horizon radiated out to me a numinous sense of goodness and beauty and holiness that I shall never forget and that will always serve as a sort of signpost for me. And anyway, it was soon to fade into memory as I went away to the university, a world that boldly, and falsely, made all these small-town realities seem rather distant and unimportant.

III

Here at the university, I encountered philosophy in a more formal way and I was strongly attracted to it. Yet there seemed to me something just as unreal about the discourse of philosophical reason as had been the case with the Protestant discourse of faith—something contrived and fantastical as I read one intellectual scheme after another purporting to explain ultimate reality and how we could know it, yet each wildly at variance with the other. I remember sitting in a class on seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy at the University of Kansas, as we tacked back and forth between the convoluted banality of British Empiricism and the conceptual phantasmagoria of Continental Rationalism, and thinking that these thought-systems were just intellectual pirouettes, clever fabrications, bearing no relation to reality at all, with the former seeming no more "empirical" than the latter. That is, the attempt of the human mind to think its way into the deepest recesses of ultimate reality began to seem to me rather presumptuous and preposterous and thus, rather silly. (And it was around this time that I began to lose faith in mathematics and

logic, at which I had previously been rather precocious, as anything more than arbitrary, formal systems—breaking the spell which had made them seem easy and rendering them to this day something of a chore for me.) Had anyone ever really believed the things that these philosophers maintained? At least the discourse of faith had had a certain earnest, ingenuous quality to it, even if it was (I thought) just as contrived. But during the last semester of my junior year, I took an upper division seminar on the phenomenology of mysticism that introduced me not just to the phenomenological method, and its attempt to remain faithful to lived experience, but also to Zen Buddhism, which seemed at the time much superior to the naïve Christian faith in which I had been raised. At least it spoke of the mystery as mystery, even if for me it did not yet evoke it. And just as important, it offered a robust program of religious *praxis* that promised to bring the adherent to a kind of inner perfection or beatitude, which Protestantism had sternly commended, without offering any suggestions regarding means that might lead to this goal. What good was it, I thought, to tell people to be good and loving, if you provided no training in how, exactly, such a transformation could be brought about?

Dropping out of college for several years and moving to the San Francisco Bay Area gave me the opportunity to explore Zen and other forms of Asian mysticism in some depth. I became a regular in a circle of seekers that often gathered around Shambhala Bookstore on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, the predecessor of the publisher that is still active today, and I embarked on adventures into Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism that left me feeling a sense of oppression rather than liberation, sensing uneasily that uniting myself with these strange absolutes would represent more a loss than a gain. But the apophaticism, or emphasis on the ineffability of the absolute that is central to Zen continued to appeal to me, and for several years I became a regular practitioner at the Zendo in Berkeley. And of course, all the books on Zen emphasized how the numinous reality of nature shone brightly within the medium of Zen *praxis*, even though as I continued to practice I felt more and more distant from the mystical aura that nature had once held for me. Moreover, once I began to become accustomed to the powerful aestheticism that attracts so many to Zen, here too a sense of oppressiveness and incipient nihilism began to settle in for me, something that I try to evoke today in posing to students in my philosophy of religion class the important question of whether the ultimate is a “Who” or a “What.” I was beginning to sense that immersion in the impersonal, with Zen as with Vedanta, ends up as a kind of self-immolation that leads not to resurrection (as with the *kenōsis* or self-emptying prescribed in Orthodox asceticism) but to oblivion and annihilation. Moreover, and fatally for my future as a Zen Buddhist, I started to see clearly that everyone I knew who was making progress in Zen was simultaneously making progress in becoming Japanese, a goal for which I could feel a certain admiration, but to which I felt little attraction, being at heart a farm kid who loved to drive cars and eat hamburgers.

IV

But how to pursue my threefold loves of nature, philosophy, and spirituality if I were not to seek *satori* but something else altogether, something that was less culturally alien? The answer came to me in the work of the later Heidegger, to which I devoted myself to varying degrees for almost three decades. And it was Heidegger that allowed me to finally embrace philosophy, which I had always kept at a certain distance, as what he called a "path of thinking"—but, of course, with the tacit understanding that this path *led* somewhere, led toward what Heidegger himself often designated as "the mystery." For here theory and *praxis* were not separate. Here fidelity to lived experience was everything, the end and the means at the same time. Here Western thought was subjected to radical, thoroughgoing critique, yet without seeming to lead me into alien worlds, but seeking instead to go even deeper into the roots of the Western tradition itself. What Weber had called the "disenchantment" of nature was here, in Heidegger's thought, contextualized into a great historical narrative that helped me understand why the natural world that so richly addressed itself to me seemed at variance with modern sensibilities, whose rationalism had resulted in what Heidegger (after Hölderlin) called "the flight of the gods." Here I came to have genuine respect for tradition, to feel humility in the face of what had emerged organically and proven itself over time, and to divest myself of the counter-cultural presumption that mine was the first generation to have possessed the truth. And in Heidegger's attempt to retrieve the meaning of "Being" *(das Sein, tō einai),* I found what I thought was the spiritual quest for which I had been seeking, with all the apophaticism that had attracted me to Zen. Heidegger's neo-paganism even allowed me a bit of the personalism for which I secretly longed, with "the gods" as personalized "messengers" of a divine essence or *Gottheit* that seemed to possess at least a vaguely personal character, and for whom the name "Being" served as a thinly disguised alias—something that has always been fairly evident to everyone apart from Heidegger scholars and devotees.

Thus, Heidegger offered me a sort of halfway house back into Christianity—a lodging where theistic thinking could at least begin to feel at home—something for which I longed without really knowing it, and which I discovered that I shared with three generations of theologians who had taken inspiration from his writings. Heidegger spoke often of the need for a "new beginning," a retrieval of the first beginning with the ancient Greeks. And so I felt, without identifying the situation, rather like those Late Hellenistic philosophers who had sensed the collapse of the old verities (in my case, Western metaphysics, and Western Christianity, for whose god Nietzsche had already provided an autopsy) but without being quite sure from whence the "new gods" were to arrive. So too, like many of my own students today, I felt that the experience of what Rudolf Otto had called *das Heilige* (the Holy) was best encountered in the natural environment, which had always spoken to me of something beyond myself. But did it speak to me of Zeus and Poseidon, of Artemis and Demeter? Gradually, this kind of intellectualized neo-paganism (which I now believe orients far too much of environmental thought) began to seem foolish and

fantastical to me. Meanwhile, I began to read contemporary theologians, most of them strongly influenced by Heidegger, and realized that Christianity might not be so naïve as I had long ago concluded. From Bultmann and Tillich to Rahner and Macquarrie, I discovered that one could translate rather easily from the language of faith (which I viewed with condescension) to the language of Heideggerian ontology. It was even possible once again to pray, even if not very well. For how does one open ones heart to "Being as such, as it reveals itself in its holiness"? How does one repent before such a deity or stand in humility before it? And doesn't the machinery of translation into a conceptual language get in the way, to say the least?

But I was nevertheless able to embrace a kind of Anglo-Catholic Episcopalianism with no difficulty, and indeed with a great deal of relief, while still maintaining all my philosophical assumptions and attitudes. And indeed, I read very widely in theology during this time, as the practice of tacitly translating from the language of religion to that of fundamental ontology gradually became second nature, almost effortless. Looking back, I certainly see this as a step toward authentic Christianity. How could it not have been, for I now invoked the name of Christ? But I fear it was at heart a largely aesthetic practice, and this was still viable, for Anglicanism at the time had not yet begun to dissolve the beauty of its traditional liturgy, music, and vestments into a kind of post-modern, spiritual flea market. Still, I considered myself a Christian, and a rather good one at that, for didn't I invest a serious amount of energy into trying to figure out the ontological correlates of the language and symbolism of faith—just what I felt was most needed for a post-modern sensibility? Wasn't this, after all, authentic apologetics? Little did I sense that I was reveling in just what I now see as most problematic about Western theology, i.e. its attempt to think its way to God, to grasp God on one's own terms, and thus to fail altogether to come into the presence of the living God. And wasn't, as I thought, the aesthetic satisfaction that I now found in Anglican worship a more mature and more cultivated form of relating to the mystery that I had always sought? Nor did I see my deconstructed, retrieved religious beliefs and sensibilities as inconveniencing me enough to require any serious alteration of actions in everyday life. For after all, not the least of the charms of aestheticism is how conveniently it can serve as a pleasant overlay to life, without making any particular demands upon it, so long as one does nothing really ugly or repulsive.

Unhappily, when I moved to Florida, the aestheticism became elusive, for I found that there was no parish to be found that even came close to the lovely liturgies of my Anglo-Catholic parishes in Philadelphia and Dallas. And with little else to draw me to church attendance, I gradually became one more of those parishioners who attend services mostly on Holy Days—that is, until my daughter began to reach the age at which I realized she was growing up to be unchurched. We had for years read together Christian fantasy literature of every sort (Lewis, Tolkien, Macdonald, L'Engle) and I thought this was quite enough to teach her the real, living content of Christianity anyway. But still I couldn't bear to see her raised without having a parish church of her own, so together we searched for one that was at least minimally satisfactory (nice liturgy, tasteful hymns) and this served my family reasonably

well, even as my own spiritual life was more truly centered on reading the latest texts in Western theology.

But it was around this time that God began sending me hints that became harder to ignore:

- Ducking into a used bookstore in Taos, New Mexico that specialized in—and perhaps God is not averse to puns—the genre of mystery novels, solely to take refuge from a blizzard swirling outside, I looked down and was startled to see the first three volumes of the English translation of the *Philokalia* for sale at (not surprisingly, given the other offerings) a very minimal price. As a good collector of theology books, I bought them at once, and afterwards always traveled with at least one volume. Even though I could make little sense of them at the time, they seemed to contain hidden within them something wonderful. Something of the mystery.
- Glancing down at a bargain rack of CD's at a little music store in Tampa, I saw two recordings of Byzantine chant by Lycourgos Angelopoulos and the Byzantine Choir, each for 99 cents. Having no idea that here was perhaps the best possible introduction to Byzantine chant, I bought them both on a whim, and then listened to at least one of them virtually every evening for 3 years, without ever wondering much what it was that made them seem so compelling and reassuring to me.
- The list of "hints" that kept commending themselves over several years could be compounded at some length. But more important yet was coming across (in a section of the newspaper I almost never visited) the announcement that a philosopher with whose name I was familiar, H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., was speaking about Orthodox Christianity the next day. My curiosity piqued, I went to hear him, and to my surprise and delight, everything he said turned out to make perfect sense. Or rather, *perfect* sense. Made more sense than any of the theology I had been reading or had ever read, his talk seemed to get things just right in a surprising way that filled me with a kind of warmth and delight and hope that lingered for many days. Yes, I would have to read more about Orthodox Christianity some time soon. Perhaps this would fill in the spiritual void I was finding in Anglicanism.
- Finally, on a 3-week trip with students to London, not long after I heard the Engelhardt talk, I was able to visit many of the celebrated Anglican churches I had previously only read about. To my disappointment, however, I found that they were empty on Sunday mornings, with just a few, rather listless people in attendance. But in the gift shop of one, I found something that interested me a great deal: the reproduction of an Orthodox icon, which I bought at once and came to treasure. But most important, on my last night in London, walking back to our apartment on Gower Street, and having gotten a bit lost on the way, I came across a little church building that was having Vespers services. I peeked in to take a look, and found the most splendid Anglo-Catholic church building I had ever seen, with a very beautiful service in progress: All Saints Margaret Street, as it turned out, a landmark in the rise of Anglo-Catholicism in nineteenth century England. I felt strongly after spending a few minutes here that I was not getting

spiritually fed at my adopted parish back in Florida, while at the same time, I knew that there was no Anglican Church at home nearly so beautiful as this. So I made a mental note to visit the Orthodox Parish, St Nicholas, the one that had invited Engelhardt to speak just a few weeks before I left for London. And there I went, on the first Sunday after my return home.

V

As my wife (a professor of art) later unrelentingly reminded me, St Nicholas was not beautiful at all. This was not St Nicholas' fine new basilica-style temple where we now worship—a close replica of the fifth century, Byzantine pilgrimage church devoted to St Symeon the Stylite in Northern Syria, now in ruins—but our old church building, a converted drive-through bank, with erratically flickering fluorescent lights hanging just overhead, and the smell of mildew wafting up from an ancient carpet scrounged from some place or other. The laminated icons were paper reproductions gotten from some uncanonical source, done in an untraditional style that I still cannot identify. And the choir was off key more often than not. Yet here was a kind of beauty that was not "aesthetic" in this narrow sense at all. I really didn't know what had happened to me on that first Sunday morning, but I was entirely overpowered, enveloped, enchanted, enraptured. I actually felt dizzy afterwards, so much was I affected, and wondered briefly whether I was collected enough to drive home at the moment. I don't know what I had been expecting. But not this, to be so completely swept away, taken up into I knew not what. (Later, I would learn that a more appropriate term than "beauty" for what I had encountered would have been *doxa*, "glory") And from that moment, I could really think of nothing else other than how to immerse myself more fully, more completely more radically, in what I had discovered. But in all honesty, this was at the same time not a little unnerving. For as a philosopher, I had become accustomed to being in control—not necessarily of the events of my life, for only a fool would imagine these to be subject to individual control. But in control of my own understanding—of where it is leading, or where it is tending. In contrast, this was a process that gave new meaning to William James' term, "radical empiricism." I didn't know exactly where I was going at all. But clearly to some place beyond my customary thoughts and categories—indeed, beyond my comprehension.

And I have seen this happen now a number of times, with students or others who have been powerfully moved by an initial experience of Orthodox Christianity. They know deep down that they have encountered something wonderful. Something powerful. Some-one powerful. Or rather, the living God has encountered them. Laid hold of them. And one wonders, what has happened to me? What is happening to me? What is *going* to happen to me? It is a sense of being over ones head, out of ones depth, of no longer being behind the wheel. Yet accompanied by a profound and marvelous sense that the vehicle is now, finally, headed in the right direction. Headed, now, toward the right place. Wherever that is…. Orthodoxy, I had found

and have been rediscovering ever since, is a faith and practice and set of beliefs and perhaps above all a mindset (*phronēma*) that will take hold of you and transform you. Beware of finally finding what you have long been seeking!

I think that a series of interviews with Orthodox converts would reveal that this is one, although surely not the only one, of the most prominent conversion typologies. There is a certain analogy here to falling in love, except that it is much more existential or ontological than emotional. Or transactional. Something has happened. Something of the greatest importance. Something far more than one had bargained for has unexpectedly taken place. A gift has been granted. That is, in Latin, *gratis*, *gratia dei,* or "grace." So the word "grace" does have meaning after all, and not only this but a meaning that can be experienced! Is the lexicon of Christian faith like this as a whole? I began to realize that this was precisely the case: not only did these old words that I had once so glibly dismissed actually have meaning, this meaning could be understood without any process of intellectual translation, but rather within Christian experience itself—i.e. it was just as empirical as the language of, say, carpentry or sailing. And beyond this, I came to understand (a) that the ancient church really had existed, and not just in some coded, mythologized sense, but existed just in the way that the witnesses of the New Testament had described it; and (b) that more surprising yet, it still existed, not in the fervent, contrived emotionalism of tent revival meetings on the outskirts of town, but within the quiet life of Orthodox villages or city side-streets in Greece or Romania or Syria or Russia: places where at least now and then, here and there, unnoticed by the world, God still spoke, where miracles still took place, where the sick were healed and the dead were raised and hearts were still changed.

VI

To my mind, one of the best (and one of the more demanding) accounts of Orthodox theology and philosophy is a relatively short book by Vladimir Lossky, translated from Russian as *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church.* That Orthodox theology is called "mystical" here does not mean that it is influenced by the writings of certain people designated as mystics—and certainly not by the "mystical individualism" of those vaunted figures of the Latin Church in the late Middle Ages who appear in every anthology, and which Lossky argues are "alien to the spirituality of the Eastern Church."[6] Rather, it means that it is not a conceptual knowledge *about* God at all, but a mystical knowledge *of* God, i.e. that its theology *is itself* a modality of mysticism, an entering into the mystery, a direct or immediate experience of what William James (surprisingly consonant with the Byzantine tradition) calls noetic realities. It is not an assemblage of concepts and assertions, but what Lossky characterizes as "a mystical theology which appeals to experience, and which

[6] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press) 1976, p. 21.

presupposes a continuous and progressive series of changes in created nature, a more and more intimate communion of the human person with the Holy Trinity."[7]

And here too, I would have never guessed! Just as I would have never imagined that the early church really had existed in very much the way it was described by its members (let alone, that it still persisted today) neither would I have guessed that ancient Christianity, traditional Christianity, authentic Christianity, was at its very heart not just "mystical," but a mode of "mysticism," or rather, is the most *authentic* mode of mysticism—the personal "rising to the mystery of the Holy Trinity," and thus the authentic encounter with the holy mystery behind and within and above all!.[8] I learned, too, that the Greek word *prosōpon*, countenance or presence or "face," that is so prominent in both Old and New Testaments, was a perfectly descriptive rendering of the central feature of the life of faith—a seeking to stand in the presence or *prosōpon* of God, with the "fear of God" no longer seen as apprehension over some arbitrary retribution should the rules be broken, but rather understood in its original, authentic sense as concern that the divine countenance, the light of life itself, might be withdrawn or turned away, through some errancy or transgression of my own.[9] This presence that I began to experience within Orthodox Christianity, it gradually became clear to me, was the very living, enchanting reality that had reached out to me throughout my life, even as it had always in the long run eluded me. And not only did I no longer need to read philosophical theology in the futile attempt to enter into this presence, it was better if I didn't. For the silence that was gained left more space for the gift to be granted.

Why had this escaped me for so long? For I considered myself well read in the history and philosophy of religion, and in fact regularly taught courses in the latter. Put simply, I came to realize that Western thought, to which I stood as heir far more than I realized, had long failed to appropriate the crucial Patristic distinction between the divine essence (*ousia*, or substance) and the divine energies (*energeiai*, activities or operations), insisting instead upon what I came to see as a very abstract concept of divine simplicity that identified the two. Now it is quite clear from scripture that the divine *essence* cannot be experienced: as God cautions Moses in Exodus 33, no one can see Him and live. And hence, there can no mysticism of the divine essence. But in the same chapter from Exodus, it is said that Moses nevertheless *was* allowed to experience certain modes of divinity, the divine "goodness" and even the divine "glory," there on Mt. Sinai. These realities that Moses encounters—like the Light of Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor experienced by Peter, James, and John—are the uncreated energies of God. Thus, the Orthodox East has maintained the ancient

[7] Ibid, p. 67.

[8] Ibid., p. 66.

[9] The Refrain from the "Canon in Preparation for Holy Communion" is indicative: *Cast me not away from Thy presence and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me*. *Orthodox Daily Prayers,* (South Canaan, PA: 1982), St Tikhon's Seminary Press, p. 119. The Greek word *prosôpon* is cited in the paragraph above from Old Testament passages, because the Greek Septuagint was the text of scripture used by Christ and all the Apostles, and thus it is the Old Testament that is read in the Orthodox Church, upholding the ancient tradition here, as in all things.

tradition of the Church, according to which the divine energies or activities, realities that are in fact all around us if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, *could* be experienced, and in fact, *should* be experienced—they represent our very birthright as baptized Christians, if our hearts have been purified, while at the same time (in contrast to the West) they humbly acknowledge the inherently mysterious character of the divine essence.[10] In contrast, as Western theology has argued, if there is no distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies, then whatever *is* experienced—even the Light of Christ on Mt. Tabor—must be understood as created entities, and hence taken merely as symbols or signs, rather than apprehended as uncreated energies of God Himself.

As a result, the only access to God—now sought solely with regard to His nature or essence, and thus as inaccessible to experience—becomes either (a) to try to think your way there (as Latin Scholasticism had tried to do, and as I myself had kept trying to do, since the eclipse of the faith of my childhood) or else (b) to simply tough it out and make a "leap of faith" as an act of will, positing a God who is neither given in experience nor arrived at through rational machinations, but asserted solely on the basis of my own strength of will in adhering to certain dogmas that I will myself to believe. (But as James had asked in "The Will to Believe," can one truly believe anything solely on the basis of will alone?) Both horns of this dilemma, of course, are worlds removed from the advice of the Psalmist to "taste and see that the Lord is good," the refrain chanted during Orthodox Eucharist in Lenten times, i.e. during the time when the Church works hardest at purifying the heart and whetting its appetite. Having tasted, one cannot but hunger for more.

Orthodoxy, I found, has refined over two millennia an exceptionally rich vocabulary for describing this mystical experience of divine grace. "*Theōria*," or illumination, the "seeing" that occurs once the soul undergoes ascetic purification or *katharsis*. *Noēsis*, the contemplative grasp of truths deeper than those at which discursive rationality can arrive. *Theōria physikê,* the ability to "see" within created nature the glimmer of the divine *logoi* or inner realities that each in their own way uniquely reflect the Eternal *Logos*. Or we may consider the radically sacramental character of Orthodoxy, while noting that the sacramentality of the objects and relics and rituals of the Church is not something merely asserted and believed, but actually encountered in experience, however dimly and partially. Nor are they even called "sacraments" in Orthodoxy, but rather *mysteries*. For if the divine energies are everywhere, and everywhere operative within the Orthodox Church, then so too are divine mysteries, and hence the Orthodox Church refuses to limit them to seven

[10] Although the essence/energy distinction was definitively elucidated by St Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century, it is articulated in the Patristic tradition at least as far back as the Cappadocian Fathers, and it is arguably present in the New Testament itself, where the Greek word *energeia* and its derivatives are used more than thirty times. "We affirm," writes St Basil the Great in the fourth century, "that we know our God by His energies, but we do not presume that it is possible to approach the essence itself. Because although His energies descend to us, his essence remains inaccessible." Cited and translated in Georges Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood," in Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*, Volume III in the *Collected Works*, (Belmont, MA: Nordland) 1976, p. 64.

or to any other number. But seeing them, living them, embracing them and being transformed by them are entirely dependent upon the Grace of Christ to allow us, like the apostles on Mt. Tabor, to "see the light." The result is a vision of salvation that is rich and robust and powerful beyond the imagination of most Western schools of Christian theology, resulting in nothing less than an infusion of our own being so thoroughly with the divine being that the Orthodox Church is bold to call it *theōsis* or divinization, becoming divine not by nature, but by grace. It is characterized well by one of Orthodoxy's greatest thinkers and saints, Gregory Palamas:

> God reveals himself "face to face, and not just in enigmas" (Num 12:8); he unites himself to those who are worthy as to his own members, as soul is united to body; he unites himself coming to dwell in his wholeness in the whole of their being, so that they in turn may dwell in him; through the Son, the Spirit is poured out abundantly upon us (Titus 3:6), and yet it is not, because of that, a created spirit.[11]

It will surely not surprise the reader who has been so patient and generous as to read this far to hear that these insights radically altered my philosophical views. Orthodoxy has given me very new and powerful insights, and it would be absurd to have partitioned them from my philosophical work, so long as they stood up well to philosophical scrutiny. Which in every case they have done far beyond expectation, not just by the criteria of logical cogency, but even more through their power to coherently resolve dilemmas that had previously seemed insoluble! For example, surely the greatest of all problems in metaphysics—arguably generative of all its most intractable quandaries— has always been the tension between unity and multiplicity, between same and other, or in the lexicon of the later Plato, between the one and the indeterminate dyad. Accordingly, Jacob Klein, the great scholar of ancient Greek philosophy, once cleverly remarked that seen in terms of "eidetic" or purely metaphysical numbers, Plato never succeeded in counting to two—i.e. in understanding how otherness was possible, without its being assimilated into a new unity, e.g. the number two. And the Patristic theology of the Holy Trinity, especially as articulated by the Cappadocian Fathers, showed quite lucidly that it is possible to count to two only by going on to count to three, i.e. that only within a triadic community—or rather, communion—can one bring same and other into relation (a relation of love) without reducing one of them to the other. As Metropolitan John Zizioulas has put it, being needs to be understood as communion. And as Florensky had already argued, within such an ontology, genuine knowledge must therefore be a higher kind of love. Nor is the problem I have just cited merely an arcane issue for specialists in metaphysics. For example, environmental philosophy has for the most part rejected theism for precisely this reason, for the sheer transcendence of a crudely unitary deity has served to diminish, or in Nietzschean terms "devalue," the cosmos, leaving environmental thought with a false dilemma between abstract theism and wholesale pantheism. This radically Trinitarian ontology of Orthodoxy, taken together with its far-reaching distinction of essence and energies, has the

[11] St Gregory Palamas, *Triads* I, 11, § 29, cited in John Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, tr. Adele Fiske, (Crestwood, NY: 1998), St Vladimir's Seminary Press, p. 116.

power to fundamentally reorient and transform our relation to creation and illumine the deepest sources of our environmental problems, i.e. as derived from profoundly misleading conclusions of Western philosophy and theology. And I could go on with other illustrations, as in fact my writing over the last 20 years has modestly tried to do!

But most importantly, it was not a philosophical process as such that brought me to this point. On the contrary—and parallel to the thought of antiquity, where revelation led to what reason could not of itself attain, in a world of decaying spirituality—it is the illuminations and epiphanies and realizations that Orthodox Christianity has brought me that have led me into such an abundance of Truth, one that allowed my philosophical quest to complete itself. Or rather, to proceed in the direction of completing itself, by emptying itself of itself as anything separate apart from the element toward which it has been striving all along as the hidden correlate of its secret longing, its innermost goal, a project that, along with St Gregory of Nyssa, I pray will continue from glory to glory unto ages of ages.

To God Be all Glory, both Now and Ever and unto the Ages of Ages.

Amen.

Chapter Six Saving Sophia: Notes Toward an Orthodox Philosophy of Nature

But that what came into being might not only be, but be good, it pleased God that his own Wisdom should descend to the creatures, so as to introduce an imprint and a likeness of Wisdom's Image on all in common and on each… And therefore has this imprint of Wisdom in the works been brought into being, that, as I said before, the world might recognize in it its own Creator the Word, and through Him the Father.

St. Athanasius (St. Athanasius, "Four Discourses Against the Arians," Discourse II, 79, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 4.)

The order of the universe is a kind of musical harmony of varied shapes and colors with a certain order and rhythm, an arrangement that is integral and in accord with itself and never dissonant, even if different parts vary greatly… The song of God's glory produced by such a rhythm and composed of every creature with different qualities is indeed transcendent.

St. Gregory of Nyssa (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, Archbishop Iakovos Library of Ecclesiastical and Historical Sources No. 17, Hellenic College Press, p. 28.)

Now in the springtime, when nature is wearing its most beautiful apparel, one feels inexpressible joy when this natural beauty is accompanied by a sublime spiritual state. Truly our holy God has made all things in wisdom. The soul cannot get enough of beholding the beauty of nature.

Elder Ephraim (Elder Ephraim, Counsels from the Holy Mountain, (Florence, AZ, St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery: 1999) p. 1.)

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_6

The most reliable hagiography of St. Symeon the Stylite was written by Blessed Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus, last of the great Antiochian theologians, and according to at least one tradition, a student of St. John Chrysostom. Since the city of Cyrrhus lay only about thirty miles to the north, Theodoret was able to visit the legendary ascetic in person on a number of occasions, seeing for himself St. Symeon's prayerful ascent toward heaven *by means of the earth itself*—by means of the fifty foot pillar, quarried on the very mountaintop to which it now (united with the Stylite) served as a crown—as well as by means of the saint's own body, which after decades of ascetic striving had surely come to have the same unyielding determination toward ascent as the stone upon which he stood. In his life of St. Symeon, included in his *Religious History (Philotheos Historia)* of the Monks of Syria, the Bishop emphasizes throughout the account his own status as an eyewitness, while in his introduction he frets that the great feats of "this consummate athlete of piety" will be regarded by posterity as "a *mythos* totally devoid of truth. For the facts," he continues, "*surpass human nature*, and men are wont to *use nature to measure what is said; if anything is said that lies beyond the limits of nature, the account is judged to be false by those uninitiated into divine things*." His conclusion, however, is hopeful; for he reasons that "since earth and sea are full of pious people educated in divine things and instructed in the grace of the All-holy Spirit… I shall [therefore] make my narration with eagerness and confidence."[1]

Bishop Theodoret writes here for those who are "educated in divine things and instructed in the grace of the All-holy Spirit," and so he can thus easily dismiss, in his introductory remarks, those future readers who will glibly "use *physis* [or, we might add, their limited understanding of the possibilities of *physis,* of the nature of things] to measure what is said," and thus judge his narrative false solely because it tells of wonderful deeds and miraculous events that surpass the limits of human *physis*. Writing as one initiate to another, he apparently sees no point in making concessions to human frailties, by giving an account of how it is possible for nature to be transitive rather than substantive, i.e. how it can be elevated beyond itself: how nature can be drawn up into heaven, even while the grace of the invisible God can be made manifest within the visible, the power of the Creator within the limits of His creation.

Yet an account of this sort is precisely what he does attempt in the striking work for which he is better known to posterity, his theological treatise, and rhetorical masterpiece, *On Divine Providence (Peri Pronoias)*.[2] In ten discourses, Theodoret—whom we shall consider only in his views on creation and divine providence, and apart from the ambiguities of his Christological quarrels with St. Cyril of Alexandria— shows in dazzling detail the pervasiveness of Divine Providence (which he identifies with the Divine *Sophia*) that is "very clearly manifest" not only in "every part of" nature, but in human affairs as well" (5:1). Here, rather than acquiescing in any kind of brute givenness of nature and consequently appealing

[1] The Lives of Simeon Stylites, pp. 71, 69; A History of the Monks of Syria, p. 160. Italics added.

[2] Theodoret of Cyrus, *On Divine Providence*, tr. Thomas Halton, Ancient Christian Writers, No. 49 (New York: Newman Press, 1988), p. 7.

only to the piety of fellow initiates in "divine things," he carefully leads the less pious reader "to inspect creation step by step," not only as a rebuttal of "those enemies who make war on the providence of God"—especially philosophers such as Aristotle and Epicurus, and their successors—but also as a kind of therapeutic "treatment" and "purgation" for those who are "victims of [these] loathsome doctrines"—those sufferers whose souls have gradually become diseased by means of the "wretched preconception" that nature operates only by necessity and chance, that it exists and functions independently, apart from God. (1:8, 11, 20; 3:1, 2)

In the first five discourses, Theodoret proceeds from the heavens to the alterations of day and night and of the seasons; from the beautiful orderings of earth and air, of rivers and sea, to the Divine Wisdom to be found in the composition of the human body, our upright posture, and the defining singularity of the human hand; and he concludes with a reflection on the fittedness of our relation to the earthly order and the wild beasts, and on how these things serve in a wonderful way as our teachers, even as they are subject to our command, despite our relative lack of physical strength. In all this, the author is at pains to show that in addition to his creation of the universe, God also perpetually maintains and conserves creation, and even beyond this (in one of the work's central metaphors) that God is constantly keeping "hold of the rudders of the universe and wisely guiding all things" (1:19; 2:1, 2; 9:1; 10:44).

We must not, then, understand nature as an independently functioning realm—an injurious "preconception" both in late antiquity and, in the words of his seventeenth century English translator, "at this time wherein Atheisme [sic] like an ill weed is growne to such height as it seemeth to overshadow the plants of true religion, while men attributing to nature what belongs properly to the Creator of Nature do both deprive God of his glory and also discover their impiety, to the danger of their own souls and the hurt of others."[3] Nature must be understood not as an autonomous region, sealed off from the power of the living God, but as inherently open to his wise steering (10:4): as everywhere obedient to his Logos (1:18) and thus as displaying God's grandeur and manifesting divine beauty (4:1). By this means, readers can be restored to "health of soul" as they "behold the providence of God itself breaking through each part of creation, manifesting and proclaiming itself and all but shouting through these elements" (3:38), and thereby "seeing God, as the prophet says, in everything, by night and by day, walking or sitting, in everything they do or suffer," (1:14).

The sixth, seventh, and eighth discourses of Theodoret's work turn to human affairs, arguing that rather than serving as an indictment against Divine Providence, human inequality and injustice in fact show its omnipresence, even in the midst of human wickedness. But what is most extraordinary is reserved for the final two discourses. In the first of these, the author shows how the workings of *physis*—the sprouting of seeds, the incorporation of nutrients in the body, the conception of the human embryo itself—allows those who want to understand the resurrection of the body, and whose souls have been healed from the bellicose arguments of the phi-

[3] Ibid, p. 7.

losophers, to be “constantly seeing reproductions of [this resurrection] and constantly hearing proclamations of it” (9:39). And finally, in the tenth discourse, the Blessed Theodoret presents the Incarnation of God as itself following from the same Divine Providence, the same manifest care for us, that God has been exercising throughout creation. Thus, far from standing in mute testimony against the holy feats of a saint such as Symeon, creation everywhere (both in the human and in the non-human realms) evinces (if it is properly understood, accurately perceived) an openness to the Divine Providence, everywhere and always, already manifests the sway of divine power.

I

Two factors, I believe, give this work by Bishop Theodoret a special interest for us today, over and beyond its rhetorical charms. First, it demonstrates his awareness of the need for a second kind of discourse about nature, in addition to the pious narrative: the need for an account prepared not just for devout initiates—who will not be prone to arm themselves with reductionist theories of nature, in order to war against the agency of God in creation, and whose own perceptions of nature are doubtless those of the Psalmist, rather than those of the *physikoi*—but rather an account that serves as an offering to those who have been confused and wounded by these same impious, reductionist accounts. He sees the need for an account prepared especially for those souls (perhaps our own as well) who have become confused and infected by the “wretched preconceptions” of the natural philosophers, and who are thus likely to “use nature [understood as governed only by necessity and chance] to measure [both]… divine things and … the grace of the all-holy Spirit.” In common with Orthodox teachers both before and after him, he holds that Orthodox Christianity cannot rest content with pious accounts, but must always engage the errors of its age through accounts that philosophically define and defend the faith against those who would make war against God and debilitate the faithful.

Second, he is of interest to us not because he is a keenly original thinker, but precisely because he is not. Indeed, many of his arguments and examples are drawn from a literature that is already, by the fourth century, bounteous. What distinguishes this work of the Blessed Theodoret in the patristic canon is not its originality, but rather its eloquence, its rhetorical polish, its coherence as an extended argument—those literary factors that make him, in the words of his contemporary American translator, “the last great torchbearer of Christian rhetoric in Asia [with] *De providentia* [being] regarded by many as exhibiting his literary power in its highest form.”[4] The arguments themselves were, by the fourth century, already mostly familiar, since many of its most decisive battles required the early Church to think carefully about issues in cosmology and the philosophy of nature:

[4] Ibid. p. 4.

1. In order to show (against philosophers and Manichees alike) that nature has not been abandoned to chance, necessity, or the powers of darkness, but that it everywhere manifests God's Providence, exhibits the Divine Wisdom.
2. In order to show (against the entire chorus of pagan philosophy) that matter was not co-eternal with God, but rather depended upon him for its very being, lest it revert to the nothingness from which it was created.
3. In order to show (against the Arians and other deniers of the Son's consubstantiality) that, and how, the *kosmos* mirrors and manifests the eternal Wisdom of the Son, precisely because it was created through the Son, who must therefore be coeternal with the Father.
4. In order to show (against all those who would claim that Christianity recklessly violates and betrays the common wisdom of humanity) that Christian revelation is in fact the true wisdom, the manifest but hidden Wisdom that demonstrates pagan wisdom to be childish and "foolish," since the latter has failed to understand how "by the greatness and beauty of the creatures, proportionately the maker of them is seen" (Wisd. Sol. 13:8)—taking their beauty to be not an image at all, but as originating from creatures themselves, and thereby worshipping them as if they were deities.

In a tradition going back to apostolic times, with the eloquent hymn to divine providence in nature to which the 20th chapter of *First Clement* is devoted, few of the Bishop's patristic predecessors or successors (especially in the East) failed to address these great themes of cosmos, nature, and creation.[5] All three of the Cappadocian Fathers took these issues as central, as had Sts. Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria before them; so too, Tertullian in his attack on Hermogenes, St. Athanasius in his dispute with the Arians, St. Irenaeus in his critique of Gnosticism, St. John Chrysostom in many of his homilies, and Blessed Augustine in a wide range of works. Finally, it must be added, Origen as well had engaged these issues in a sustained and powerful manner, but in a way that at the same ended up creating many of the problems that the teachers of the Church just mentioned (including Blessed Theodoret) were at pains to resolve.

But this otherwise remarkably coherent and consistent teaching of the early Church was itself by no means novel. It represented, rather, the continuation and development of a largely poetic tradition in the Old Testament, which had presented (and articulated in wonderful detail) a constant invocation, not just throughout the Psalms and in the concluding chapters of Job and in the other Wisdom Books, but throughout the scriptures as a whole:

> O LORD, how manifold are thy works!
> In wisdom hast Thou made them all (Ps 103/104)

And balancing this naming and this praise of Divine Wisdom in the cosmos, the Fathers could find in the Old Testament an equally regular warning against failing to see that this glorious cosmos is not independent or self-subsistent, but rather

[5] See Supplement I.

manifests the glory of its creator: "Take ye good heed unto yourselves… lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun and the moon and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them and serve them which the LORD thy God hath imparted unto all nations under the whole heaven" (Deut. 4: 15, 19). The two themes, in fact—both the invocation and the warning—aim at precisely the same point of balance: to see the grandeur and beauty of creation *as* manifestations of the Divine Wisdom and Glory—to see them, i.e. to not fail to notice them, but at the same time to see them as iconic, as images. Moreover, the early Church and the Fathers could develop this great theme with such depth—indeed, with such wisdom—only because they had now seen the Divine Wisdom inexpressibly manifest in creation through the Incarnation of the Son and the Grace of the Holy Spirit, the uttermost fulfillment of the same wisdom and beauty long since found, by pagan and gentile alike, in nature and cosmos.

The rhetoric of Blessed Theodoret, then, draws upon this great inheritance of wisdom, in order to refute those whose understanding of nature derives from their war against divine providence—and to help heal those whom this tool of war has so sickened that they fail to see how nature manifests the Divine Goodness and Wisdom always and everywhere, and hence naively employ this mistaken notion of a self-subsistent cosmos to judge holy deeds and miraculous events, rejecting out of hand those cases in which the divine energies are made manifest in creation even more visibly, and even more dramatically, than is always the case. Nor does this tradition of thought regarding nature, cosmos, and creation and their relation to God end in the fourth century. On the contrary, it is developed much further and articulated far more powerfully in all of the greatest thinkers of Orthodox Christianity:

1. With St. Dionysius the Areopagite, whose work as a whole is directed toward articulating a great union of the created order with its Creator, outlining in his symbolic theology how (citing St. Paul) "the ordered arrangement of the whole visible realm makes known the invisible things of God," as well as demonstrating in his ontology that God is not only "the substantive Cause and maker of being, subsistence, of existence, of substance, and of nature," but also that "He is the being immanent in and underlying the things which are, however they are."[6]
2. With St. Maximos the Confessor, who maintains straightforwardly that the contemplation of God in nature is a fundamental element of the spiritual life for Orthodox Christians, and provides an elaborate understanding of the ubiquity of divine *logoi* in creation to make this intelligible.
3. With St. Symeon the New Theologian, who offers us a vision of mankind as exercising a cosmic priesthood: as offering up the created order back to the Creator through our noetic apprehension of the Divine Beauty and the Divine Wisdom in nature as it glorifies the Creator.
4. And with St. Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century, who unfolds and develops the Cappadocian and Dionysian thought of the Divine Energies as every-

[6] Colm Luibhid, tr. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 284, 98.

where infused, and as constantly operative, throughout the created order, even as the Divine Essence remains shrouded in clouds darker than those that once hung over Mt. Sinai.

These are not marginal ideas, philosophical and theological eddies, but the main current of Orthodox thought through the fourteenth century, the ongoing manifestations of a tradition that has never seen fit to abandon nature to the status of a brute givenness—whose self-subsistence would serve as a mute refutation of "divine things," and hence as a renunciation of its own Creator. And of course, neither are they simply free-floating concepts, contrived abstractions moved about on a theological game board. They are entirely rooted in the experience of nature and the cosmos that has been granted to an unbroken lineage of holy ascetics (including the authors enumerated) in a mystical tradition that is just as consistent—and perhaps even more convincing in regard to the centrality of the experience of nature as creation to the life of the Great and Holy Church—in comparison to that found in the more formal philosophical and theological works. From the innumerable stories and sayings of the Desert Fathers of the Thebaid to the writings of Athonite Fathers of the twentieth century, including holy men and women still living today, we find unwavering expressions of an experience of nature as holy and venerable: of creation not as a self-enclosed system of blind causation, but as the gift of a loving Father, as the surety of Divine Providence, as the eloquent expositor of the Divine Sophia, the Wisdom of God.[7] And as noted already, this mystical tradition is itself deeply grounded in the Psalmody and Wisdom Books that the Church has inherited as its legacy. Both the ascetical and theological literature of the Church, going back to the earliest books of the Old Testament, show that Blessed Theodoret, in his efforts to showed the Divine Providence and Wisdom operating everywhere in nature, is simply giving voice to "what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all" (St. Vincent of Lérins).

II

This tradition of thought and experience expressing the Orthodox insistence upon seeing the Divine Wisdom as everywhere present and operative in the created order represents a fundamental and indispensable element of the patristic mindset (*phronēma*), of the "mind of the Fathers." It represents what we may fairly call the "Great Tradition" of understanding creation that permeates Orthodox thought and sensibility. Yet strangely, even though the experience and sensibility of this Great Tradition persists to the present day—to be found most especially in the writings and transcribed sayings of holy ascetics and Elders—its corresponding conceptual articulation seems at first glance to have remained frozen in the Palamite synthesis of the fourteenth century, in what can be seen as a rather un-patristic neglect. The

[7] See Supplement II, as well as the literature on figures such as St. Silouan and the Elder Paisios.

remainder of this paper, then, will rather briefly (1) pose the question of why this has been the case, (2) try to discern from provisional answers to this question what would be required to restore this Great Tradition of Orthodox thought on creation, and (3) very briefly consider some reasons that this might be an important, and even indispensable, project to undertake.

1. *Why has modern Orthodox thought neglected to reflect upon the relation of creation to its Creator? Why has the Great Tradition of reflection on nature as creation apparently ended in the fourteenth century?*

A plausible first response might be that this is simply not the case. In one of the key theological writings of the twentieth century, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, one of modern Orthodoxy's most influential theologians, Vladimir Lossky, discussed the relation of God and creation at great length, and with evident sympathy for the topic. But in fact what Lossky undertakes is exclusively an exegesis—even though an insightful and sometimes brilliant exegesis—of this same Great Tradition of Orthodox thought on nature, cosmos, and creation up to, and especially including, St. Gregory Palamas. (Indeed, Lossky's exegesis here makes all the points I have tried to outline Part II, in a far more incisive way.) And even more does this apply to the historical work of Fr Georges Florovsky on creation, which looks back at the patristic appreciation of creation rather than continuing it, and which emphasizes the autonomy and underlying nothingness of creation so exclusively that it overshadows the divine wisdom and providence in nature, leaving us with a tacitly positivistic cosmology. Even the otherwise brilliant work of Fr. John Romanides leaves creation to modern natural science, and at times even seems to openly embrace a view of creation drawn from the logical positivism that reigned during the time of his early writing.

Perhaps, however, it might be answered that there is no further need for new developments such as those elaborated by Sts. Dionysius, Maximos, Symeon, Gregory, et al., each of whom was responding (just as did Blessed Theodoret) to views of nature contemporary to the authors themselves (such as the scholastic views of St. Gregory's nemesis, Barlaam of Calabria) that in each case threatened to subvert the Orthodox faith. Perhaps we face no such threats today. Indeed, perhaps modern natural science has closed this chapter of human thought altogether by comprehending nature as a theologically neutral system of efficient causation that no longer needs to be the topic of either philosophical or theological reflection at all. But isn't this positivistic claim simply the same pagan view of nature against which not only Theodoret, but all the Fathers mentioned above struggled with such determination—only rendered even more insidious, since it is rhetorically garbed with the aura of neutrality, hence of "objectivity," hence of "reality," disguising the fact that it is radically toxic to Orthodox spirituality? The notion of nature as a closed and self-subsistent system, operating—and thus intelligible—within purely immanent boundaries, and thus without any possible, intelligible reference to anything beyond itself, is simply a more dedicated, a more intransigent, a more stealthy, and thus a more dangerous version of the pagan views, and one that is perhaps even

more dangerous to spiritual health, even as it declares war more systematically upon "the providence of God."

But if this is then case, then there is not only cause for a restoration of the Great Tradition, but an urgency to this project. And if this is so, why has this task been neglected? Numerous historical factors, it would seem—notably the Turkish Occupation of the Balkans and Middle East, and cultural-geographical isolation in Russian lands—insulated the Orthodox world from the rise of modern science. When Russia was finally exposed, with almost no inoculation beforehand, it very nearly succumbed to the worldview of science, rationalism, and "enlightenment." But as it developed immunities, it began to resist and, beginning in the nineteenth century, indeed went on to develop a rich tradition of thought regarding nature and creation that was intended to provide a refutation of, and corrective to, the Western, rationalistic, scientistic views that threatened Orthodox piety. Might not this recent Russian tradition of thought on nature, cosmos, and creation that continued into the mid-twentieth century itself perhaps have been a restoration of the Great Tradition? And why do both Florovsky and Lossky respond so allergically to these writers, if this is to at least some extent the case?

2. *What suggestions do the answers to these questions offer for the project of an Orthodox philosophy of nature?*

In fact, Lossky and Florovsky do not ignore this tradition of Russian thought on nature and creation, for much of their work must be seen as carefully attempting—often point by point—to refute, displace, and discredit this work by proceeding in the very way that they believed Orthodox thought should function: less in frontal critique and refutation, but precisely in a quiet return to what we have called the Great Tradition. This "neo-patristic synthesis"—the understanding that Orthodox theology and philosophy must proceed exclusively as an exegesis of the Great Tradition—has been so successful that many of us today simply take it as the traditional norm for Orthodox thought. But as this chapter has argued, the traditional norm for Orthodox thought about nature and creation has been to loyally defend the regime of Divine Providence in nature against those contemporaries who have, in the past as they will in the future, declared war upon it, and have thus debilitated those who are not "educated in divine things and instructed in the grace of the All-holy Spirit." In short, the neo-patristic school has led us to precisely the option that the patristic tradition itself shunned: speaking only to those initiated in divine things, leaving the others (the non-Orthodox, and the weakly Orthodox, and perhaps ourselves as well) with a view of nature that debilitates their piety and causes them to judge against the divine things themselves.

Why, then, did Lossky and Florovsky—founders of the neopatristic school—turn against their immediate predecessors and contemporaries in such a radical fashion? Was this some kind of willful obfuscation? Or was it somehow justified? A full answer would be complex, going into academic politics at St. Sergius in Paris, as well as the politics of jurisdiction and legitimacy in the Russian Patriarchate.[8] But a

[8] These issues are treated with admirable fairness and great insight in Paul Gavrilyk's book, *Geroges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaiassance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

simple answer, which I believe goes to the heart of the matter, is that the source of their reaction against what *was* in many ways a restoration of the Great Tradition was simply their well-founded revulsion at what seemed to them to be the culmination of this century of Russian thought on nature and creation: revulsion at the powerful, and powerfully problematic, and possibly crowding the borders of heresy, but without a doubt spiritually treacherous, "sophiology" of Sergei Bulgakov, the Great Train Wreck that shut down the lines not just temporarily, but so conclusively that they remain largely inoperative to this day.

What, then, was problematic in the sophiology of Bulgakov, his attempt to articulate an Orthodox synthesis, with Divine Wisdom (Sophia) at its center, that would do for the modern Eastern Church what Aquinas had tried, unsuccessfully, to do for the medieval Western Church? Philosophically and theologically, this is a complicated issue, but we can note that at the very least, he gives a strong appearance of (a) trying to conceptualize not only the Divine Energies, but the Divine Essence as well, of (b) developing a quasi-emanationist model of creation that undermines divine freedom, and (c) putting Sophia as a Platonic *metaxu* or "between" connecting God and nature, Creator and Creation. The first violates a cardinal principle of Orthodox apophaticism, i.e. the doctrine that the divine essence is forever unknowable and inherently mysterious. The second binds God to a certain necessity of His nature. And the third places a realm between ourselves and God that, especially to the extent that it is rendered hypostatic, is (at its worst) ultimately idolatrous, displacing God as a terminus of worship.

But perhaps the most incisive critique ends up being the simplest. In his sermon on "The Spiritual Condition of Russians in the Diaspora," St. John Maximovitch argues that such "sophianism" (and it is not clear whether or not this refers only to Bulgakov) comes from "the feeling of keen pride connected with faith in the possibility of man living by his own wisdom [that is] quite characteristic of many people cultured by today's standards, who place their own deductions higher than everything." Translated into philosophical terms, this suggests that Bulgakov rejected the modernist notion of an independent, self-subsistent nature *(res extensa)* only by positing, and proceeding from, an independent and self-subsistent realm of thought *(res cogitans)*. But of course these two positions (naturalism, and humanism) are simply two sides of the same modernist view of philosophy that is by now seen as heretical not just in theology, but in most philosophical circles as well.

The problem with Bulgakov's sophiology is not that it tries to develop a positive understanding of the Divine Wisdom (this is precisely what needs to be done, in order to defend against the assault upon Divine Providence and Wisdom in nature, and thus restore the Great Tradition) but that he proceeds in a way that is still implicitly bound (on the side not of the "object," but of the "subject") to the same Western, modernist premises—in this case the self-subsistence and autonomy of thought over against the claims and caveats and traditions of the Church Itself. The Sophia that must be saved, then, is by no means the "sophia" of Bulgakov's system. Rather, it is

the Divine Wisdom itself that must be saved, both from Bulgakov as well as from the modern scientific ontology and the consequent infectious worldview. Put differently, Orthodox *theology of creation* needs a *philosophy of natur*e that (in contrast to the neo-pagan, scientific ontology) shows its transparency (and, as fallen, its opacity) to the Divine Wisdom or Sophia, while at the same time avoiding the proud pretensions that have made modernist metaphysics just as toxic to Orthodox piety, and which undermine the work of much (but by no means all) of Russian reflections on nature, cosmos, and creation since the middle of the nineteenth century. (By this latter criterion, Solovyov and Bulgakov are rendered especially suspect, while Dostoevsky and Pavel Florensky suggest themselves especially for further study. Perhaps too, the more errant of Bulgakov's ideas could have the same effect of sharpening our consciousness of what is Orthodox, precisely through our refutation of them, as did the ideas of his equally brilliant, if frequently wayward predecessor Origen in the early Church.)

3. *What is the current need for an Orthodox philosophy of nature?*

Creation—i.e. nature understood as proceeding from, and as manifesting, the Divine Wisdom—is being subjected today to the ontological equivalent of "total war." (a) At both the microscopic and the macroscopic levels—from the demented machinations of transhumanism in the West to the intrusion into genetic engineering—*nature itself* is everywhere under assault from the technological attempt to subject the Divine Wisdom to the human "wisdom" of calculative rationality and instrumental domination. (b) Meanwhile, our *native understanding of nature* is itself so thoroughly bound by the scientific ontology, that our very experience of the Divine Wisdom and the Divine Glory in creation is rendered "subjective," privatized and defused of its spiritual majesty and power. (c) And beyond this, the very notion of *human nature* is being subjected to the same warfare—with equally disastrous consequences for philosophical anthropology and the Orthodox way of life—as it become radically relativized and trivialized by the pretense that human nature itself is not created at all, but socially constructed. It is not clear how Orthodox Christianity can be sustained under such conditions on more than an emergency basis *so long as the fact and character of this warfare remains concealed*. And it is even less clear how it can understand itself as the Church Militant if it has neither the filial loyalty to defend the Fatherly Creator against the most extreme hostilities, nor even the human compassion to defend those whose piety is less developed, against views that would ruin their spiritual health. (The first line of Blessed Theodoret's work on Divine Providence reads: "It is a law imposed on men by nature that children avenge the wrong done to their parents, and servants those done to their masters…" It is several pages later, in section 11, that he explains that he is referring to "the company of those who war on the Providence of God.")

The neopatristic school has reminded us that to address these questions effectively, we must humbly listen to the Fathers of the Church. But as even Lossky and Florovsky acknowledge, the term "patristic" refers not primarily to a long past period of history (otherwise, St. Gregory would hardly count as patristic) but to a sensibility or mindset that can only be learned by a prayerful listening to, and heed-

ing of, these very voices. And to attempt to defend both creation and piety solely by exegeses of the Great Tradition puts us at odds with that tradition itself, by looking to this tradition not for examples of how to deal with these ever-current challenges, but rather as a substitute for philosophically dealing with them at all. That is, we risk making the most audacious assumption that "earth and sea are full of pious people educated in divine things and instructed in the grace of the All-holy Spirit," an assumption far less plausible today than in fourth century Byzantium, and which even Blessed Theodoret prudently supplements by a philosophical and theoretical account far more extensive than the hagiography he intended for the ears of the pious.

Supplements

Supplement I

Clement's First Letter, Section 20 (c. AD 96)

The heavens move at his direction and peacefully obey him. Day and night observe the common course he has appointed them, without getting in each other's way. The sun and the moon and the choirs of stars roll on harmoniously in their appointed courses at his command, and with never a deviation. By his will and without dissension or altering anything he has decreed the earth becomes fruitful at the proper seasons and brings forth abundant food for men and beasts and every living thing upon it. The unsearchable, abysmal depths and the indescribable regions of the underworld are subject to the same decrees. The basin of the boundless sea is by his arrangement constructed to hold the heaped up waters, so that the sea does not flow beyond the barriers surrounding it, but does just as he bids it. For he said, "thus far you shall come, and your waves shall break within you." The oceans which men cannot pass, and the worlds beyond it, are governed by the same decrees of the Master. The seasons, spring, summer, autumn, and winter, peacefully give way to each other. The winds from their different points perform their service at the proper time and without hindrance. Perennial springs, created for enjoyment and health, never fail to offer their life-giving breasts to men. The tiniest creatures come together in harmony and peace. All these things the great Creator and Master of the universe ordained to exist in peace and harmony. Thus, he showered his benefits on them all, but most abundantly on us who have taken refuge in his compassion through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and majesty forever and ever. Amen.

Supplement II

From *Christ Is in Our Midst: Letters from a Russian Monk*, 28 August, 1954

In his day, the prophet David said: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’”, and here you have joined yourself to this foolishness. You think so flippantly, but I believe deeply and am convinced that God exists, there is a future life, there is eternal torment for sinners and eternal bliss for the righteous.

How could I not believe in God when wherever I look, everywhere I see and contemplate God’s wisdom and goodness. With what wisdom everything is created, and how harmonious is the whole earthly sphere! The Holy Church sings: “How magnificent are thy works, O Lord; Thou hast made all things in wisdom.” Thy works are marvelous, Lord; wherever I look, everywhere I see thy creative hand. I look at the sun and see it shedding light like a golden plate and warming the whole globe. And what numbers of animals abound in the forest, each with its own characteristics. The horse is so large, and yet it obeys man; the Lord created it to help man. And the cow eats hay and its stomach makes nourishing milk for man. And the meek lamb, how much good it does for man; we get fur coats, stockings and much else. I look at the bird kingdom—simply marvelous, how decorative they are and what a variety of species. And in the earth what a variety of worms and insects; there are even worms that shine at night like lights. I look at the ant and wonder at its labors—it exposes my laziness. And the wise bee gathers such sweet honey for man from the different flowers. And look in the water; there is the special kingdom of fish, how many different species; all live and move according to God’s purpose.

I love nature altogether. I come into the forest and wonder at every tree and knoll and I contemplate the Almighty Creator….

Again I am wondering at God’s creation. I love the moonlit nights of winter, everywhere utter silence; I put on my fur coat, felt boots and warm cap, go out into the yard and marvel at God’s wisdom—the moon is shining, and so many stars, the whole sky is adorned with them, far away and still farther, just single little stars endlessly. Marvelous are thy works, O Lord, in wisdom Thou hast made them all!

The more I look at nature, the more I wonder at and come to know the omnipotence of the Creator. I was not educated; I have not even read scientific books; I have written this from my feelings, having read the Bible a great deal. My life has passed; I am already in my 82nd year.

Chapter Seven Nature and Divine Wisdom: How (Not) to Speak of Sophia

Why We Need a Lexicon of Divine Wisdom in Nature: The Sophiology of Dostoevsky

It is one of the most powerful scenes in the novel. The novice monk, quietly dreading the loss of his beloved spiritual father, is nonetheless excited to think that he himself will be among the few to hear his last words. Elder Zosima, the very "light of love" for his young disciple Alyosha, is dying.

The name for Alyosha (or Alexei), the gentle "hero" of *The Brothers Karamazov*, was derived from that of Dostoevsky's infant son, while his character was drawn from the author's young friend, Vladimir Solovyov, the great founder of Russian sophiology. After the child Alexei's death in 1878, the novelist traveled to the remote Monastery of Optina Pustyn, accompanied by Solovyov, in the hope of finding solace and healing for his intractable grief. According to his widow, after long discussions with Elder Ambrose, himself a model for Zosima in the novel, Dostoevsky found the peace he sought in this lovely monastery. Optina Pustyn or Optina-in-the-Wilderness—nestled on a hillside slope at the lower edge of a thick, largely coniferous forest, overlooking the Zhizdra River Valley and the fertile fields beyond—is an extraordinary place that to this day radiates the luxuriant beauty and simple goodness of creation, quietly testifying to why it was chosen as the place where great words were spoken concerning the holy goodness and sparkling beauty of nature. Here, to the select group of "his most faithful friends" sharing with him his last hours, the Elder delivers a remarkable series of recollections and reflections, lovingly recorded and preserved by the novice, Alyosha.

This essay has greatly benefitted from readings by Hieromonk Alexios (Trader) of Karrakalou Monastery, Fr. Hans Jacobse of St Peter Orthodox Church, and Prof. David Bradshaw of the University of Kentucky. Of course, any remaining weaknesses are attributable solely to the author.

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_7

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that these final thoughts and exhortations of Elder Zosima, forming the spiritual heart of *The Brothers Karamazov,* feature a theme that had hardly been central in Dostoevsky's previous novels: the understanding of nature as a locus for encountering God, nature as deeply expressive of God's love and wisdom. And this is all the more significant in view of the author's intention for this novel to serve as his final testament, the sum of his life-wisdom to the world. In Zosima's reflections and recollections, we hear narrated a series of lives into which the divine radiance of creation has entered and shone brightly—lives for which, following acts of repentance and renewal, creation revealed itself differently, disclosed its paradisiacal depths, showed that it had been Eden all along—and these narratives stand in stark contrast to the soliloquies of Ivan, for whom God is no more than a hypothesis and an abstraction, and who stands as the last in a series of unhappy, disappointed, Westernized intellectuals in Dostoevsky's fiction, such as the Underground Man and Raskolnikov. These are figures whose hearts have been corrupted by their thoughts, and by their attachment to their thoughts, and for whom created nature is an object of contempt (the battered and bitter Underground Man, for whom it is a realm of dumb necessity) or revulsion (Raskolnikov, who from within the Hell of his own making, experiences nature as scorching and acrid and sulfuric, i.e. as itself infernal). Nihilistic figures who have undergone neither the *katharsis* (purification of the heart) nor the subsequent *metanoia* (change of heart) that would allow them to experience God in nature and in others—men whose hearts are clouded with dark thoughts, not knowing that it is the pure in heart who shall see God—men who, not finding God in creation, conclude that they themselves are the creators of value. Cerebral, disembodied figures (shades, perhaps) believing only in the reign of the Man-God, humanity elevating itself to the status of world-creator.

In his last years, Dostoevsky saw this as the great decision forcing itself upon us today: the choice between the reign of the God-Man (Christ Himself, uniting God and humanity, drawing together heaven and earth) and the regime of the Man-God (humanity usurping the place of the Creator, elevating itself to the position of divinity). And if the first option is to be embraced, Dostoevsky seems to say, a sense of creation infused with divinity will play a critical role—a transfiguration of both environmental nature and human nature that is, even more radically, a revealing of their inner truth, of the depths in which they are rooted—of that original face creation can turn to us, if we have a face to turn towards it. An experience of what certain Russian philosophers called "Sophia" or the divine wisdom in nature.

For if God is merely transcendent to the world, without at the same time being present within the world, then is He not (for us) merely an abstraction, one thought contending with others for legitimacy and preeminence? And by now, Dostoevsky understood that clever arguments against religious faith, such as those presented by Ivan Karamazov, cannot be overcome with other, even more clever arguments to the contrary, and that in the modern court of discursive thought—lacking the religious experience that could once be presupposed—the arguments for unbelief are invincible, capable of being overcome not by counter-arguments, but only by life itself: first the life of Elder Zosima, and then by the life of his disciple Alexei, whose warm-hearted and genuine love for actual, living children depicted in the last pages

finally triumphs over his brother Ivan's theoretical, abstract compassion for conjectural children and their hypothetical suffering. Dostoevsky, then, in this last full statement of his thought suggests that in this incipient age of the Man-God, it is today in the lives of holy people and in the beauty of nature that we can best encounter the living God, the God who will not be contained by His own transcendence.[1] And it is this numinous draw of creation, perhaps most evident to us in nature—this pull or persuasion or current within the visible that beckons us toward the invisible—this engaging and evocative interfacing between Creator and creation—that Dostoevsky's young colleague Solovyov, along with two generations of Russian thinkers, designated by the word "Sophia."

The Divine Wisdom in Nature

Zosima's discourses poetically depict a deep beauty and an enchanting mystery in created nature—a dimension of creation that can be apprehended only to the extent that the heart is purified. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" states Christ's counsel for being blessed or divinely happy, *makarios*. "The apprehension of the nature of things changes according to the inner disposition of the soul," states Nikitas Stithatos in the *Philokalia*.[2] "Each blade of grass, each little bug, ant, golden bee," exhorts Elder Zosima, witnesses "to the divine mystery, [because] they ceaselessly enact it."[3] And the narrative illustrates how purity of heart is required to see this divine wisdom at work in the world:

- For the cynical intellectual Ivan, nothing more is possible for him than a wistful glimpse of the spring-green leaves each year, although he confesses that it is this alone that allows him to keep on living.
- For the high-minded, but passionate and unruly Dmitri, the inner beauty of nature is more accessible. "Let me be cursed, let me be base and vile," exclaims Dmitri, "but let me also kiss the hem of that garment in which my God is clothed."[4] And this garment is nothing other than Edenic nature—however it is to be found—with its shining sun, its clear sky, its green leaves, however clouded the perception.

---

[1] In Florensky's classic discussion, Sophia is first discussed not in nature, but in the lives of the saints and monastic elders, in "the beauty of spiritual life"; see Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, tr. Boris Jakim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1997, pp. 233f. (Hereafter, PGT)

[2] PGT 200, *The Philokalia,* Vol. 4, St Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth, tr. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 92; trans. altered.

[3] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, tr. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volikhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1991), 295. Hereafter, BK

[4] BK, 107.

- But for the third brother, Alyosha, whose embrace of suffering has brought about a certain purification of the soul, the experience of the night sky seems as if he were "touching other worlds": "The silence of the earth seemed to merge with the silence of the heavens, the mystery of the earth touched the mystery of the stars" as he ecstatically, rapturously falls to the ground and kisses the very earth itself.[5] Weeping and repentant, Alyosha encounters God within the element of the Divine Wisdom. But he doesn't name it. Rather, he is wordlessly caught up into its sublime silence. And we could call this Sophia.

Should we? According to St Clement of Alexandria, Heraclitus had said: "That which is wise *(to sophon)* is one, and it both allows and does not allow itself to be called by the name of Zeus" (Fragment 32). And a central thesis of the present essay might be formulated as a gloss on this ancient fragment: *The Divine Wisdom, which is one with God, both allows and does not allow itself to be called Sophia*. For as soon as we name what is encountered by Alyosha; or by Zosima's young brother Markel, who apologized to the birds for ignoring their joyfulness; or by Zosima and an itinerant barge hauler sitting quietly at the edge of a great, peaceful river on a starry summer's night—when we objectify this as something or someone, do we not render it a thing among things, or an individual among individuals, one more item in the ontic inventory—positing yet another obstruction between ourselves and God? Do we not obscure the overwhelming and ineffable character of what is experienced, which is not one perception among others, but an eventful seeing, a privileged encounter, an initiatory unveiling that has been granted, and whose evanescence will not allow it to linger for long or be fixed in place—i.e. not something substantive, as Western metaphysics would hold, but rather something transitive—more an unfolding than a subsisting? But setting aside these reservations for later discussion, I shall for now speak of Sophia, and of our great need for an understanding of what it names—along with an experience of that to which it points. For surely the word "sophia" is no more problematic than either "nature" or "environment" as a name for what needs to be understood, and relatively speaking, much less so.

Indeed, the concept of "nature" is a central part of the problem, so heavily is it burdened with metaphysical baggage. Since the Latin Middle Ages, nature has been contrasted to, and opposed by, the supernatural. Nature here is non-porous, sealed within its own wrappers, metaphysically discrete from the supernatural, substantially incommensurate with it. And with the Protestant Reformation, nature becomes radically opposed to grace as well. To this, Western metaphysics has added the opposition of nature and freedom, with the "spiritual" realm of freedom somehow standing ghostlike outside the realm of natural necessity. Add to this the longstanding equation of nature with substance, and the presupposition that true substance *(protē ousia)* is what can stand on its own, without need of anything else, and we have a monstrous distortion of creation: nature as something bereft of divinity and grace, a realm of blind necessity that, standing self-sufficiently by itself, has no need of, or inner connection to, anything transcendent, leaving qualities such as

[5] BK 362.

goodness and beauty merely subjective labels that we attach to things like little children putting stickers (values) on the household furniture (facts). Creation here becomes a harsh prison cell, a realm of impenetrable surfaces without depth, a frozen land in which visibility itself, rather than serving as an aperture to the invisible, becomes a weave of metaphysical barbed wire, blocking ingress and egress—in short, nature so understood and experienced becomes a cruel and escape-proof *gulag* into which it would today be considered unspeakably inhumane to place living human beings. And it is from precisely this kind of metaphysical imprisonment that "sophiology," the study of Sophia, would offer to free us.

Discussing sophiology in the work of Sergei Bulgakov, Fr. Andrew Louth provides us summary approaches to what is meant by Sophia, at least within the Russian succession from Solovyov to Florensky to Bulgakov. And it is with this body of work—surely the starting point for anything like a viable appropriation of this concept today—that this essay will concern itself. "The gulf between the uncreated God and Creation," writes Louth, "does not put Creation in opposition to God; rather Wisdom constitutes a kind of *metaxu*, 'between,' between God and humans/Creation, for Wisdom is that through which God created the universe, and it is equally through wisdom that the human quest for God finds fulfillment."[6] But supplementing this concept of a bridge or link, a *tertium quid* between heaven and earth, Louth continues with a very different image: "Wisdom, one might say, is the face that God turns towards his Creation, and the face that Creation, in humankind, turns toward God."[7] The author draws here upon the ancient experience of the divine *prosōpon*, so prominent in the Old Testament, evoking the "face," or "presence," or "countenance" of God without which life has no meaning, is unendurable darkness. (And we may note in passing how radically different are the Psalmist's experiences of God within the gift of that Holy Countenance without which life is desperate and pointless, and the modern experience—typified by Nietzsche—of a "supernatural" God as intrusive and meddling in an otherwise independent realm of "nature"—unneeded and unwanted in a self-sufficient world inhabited by confident, self-possessed hominids, haughty in their imagined independence.[8] But apart from the important question of whether the sophianic element is more like a bridge or a facing, the same appraisal follows in either case: "Creation is not abandoned by God," Louth affirms: "Creation is graced, it is holy; in creation God may be encountered."[9] And in this holiness of creation, we find a promise of release from our metaphysical imprisonment in "nature," something we may hope sophiology can address. Moreover, we can arrive at this same nexus from several other directions as well:

---

[6] Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2015), p. 58.

[7] Ibid.

[8] On the modern, supernatural God of Western metaphysics as intrusive and unwelcome, see Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[9] Louth, p. 58.

1. The insight into a hidden depth of creation allows us to affirm that beneath the ontological ice, behind the hard edges, lies something very different: a loving presence, the welcoming embrace of a long-familiar face. Created nature is not made of cast iron, but is permeable, like the air, like the soil. As the Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky puts it: "The Eastern tradition knows nothing of 'pure nature' to which grace is added as a supernatural gift. For it, there is no natural or 'normal' state, since grace is implied in the act of creation itself."[10] Nature is everywhere shot through with grace, permeated by what is misleadingly called "super-nature," inherently interwoven with freedom. As two centuries of nature poets have understood—figures from Hölderlin to Hopkins, from Traherne and Wordsworth to Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir—nature is still a place where we can meet God, just as surely as it was long ago in the Sinai Peninsula, in the Judean Desert, at the Sea of Galilee, in the Egyptian Thebaid.

It is doubtful whether there is any religion that has not in some way based itself upon experience. And if we are to experience God, to engage with God, then there must be some manner of divine immanence through which that encounter could take place. But in a world where only the nature of modern science is taken seriously, in a deistic world in which God is forever "off somewhere" leaving nature to function on its own, there are no apertures for the divine countenance to appear—no bushes so "charged with the grandeur of God" that they might burst into mystic flame before our eyes. Religious experience intrinsically demands something like Sophia, an infusion of the divine, of the invisible and heavenly, into the visible and earthly.

2. Moreover, the earthly as such cannot just be jettisoned into the briny waters of scientific objectification. Philosophical naturalism is the belief that what is, as well as "what can be," is nothing other than the object of natural science. But if the naturalistic thesis is true, then goodness and beauty and holiness are not genuinely attributable to nature, which has become nothing more than an aggregate of nodal points for indifferent, scientific laws. What we call "facts" would be utterly lacking in what we, equally misleadingly, have come to call "values." We may think here of William Carlos Williams' poem in which bombs falling through space are compared to falling snowflakes, and of how the poem affirms the abysmal difference between them. The poem, "The Snow Begins," opens thus:

> A rain of bombs, well placed,
> is no less lovely
> but this comes gently over all …

The poet-physician Williams, educated as a medical scientist, knows that the laws of mechanics and aerodynamics are fundamentally inadequate to grasp the deepest differences between snowflakes and bombs. For without goodness, without

[10] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 101.

a beauty that is more than merely "lovely," without the ultimate criterion of holiness, is not the distinction, upon which the poem hinges, itself opaque?[11] With the third line, "but this…," Williams snaps us out of the cultural trance, awakens us from "single vision" and Newton's Dream, restores to us a heart of flesh rather than a heart of stone. And the final stanza makes the point even more powerfully: the snow, "white as death," nevertheless dignifies what it covers "as no violence ever can/gently and silently in the night."[12] Williams' poem could rightfully be called sophianic, awakening us from the barrenness of naturalism and retrieving the realm of divinely created nature from its scientific facsimile.

3. Yet again, today when ubiquitous video recordings show us in terrible detail the suffering arising from deadly tsunamis and devastating hurricanes, when nearly everyone knows someone stricken by cancer, in which the living body's very cells turn against it, we suffer profoundly from the lack of a natural theodicy. Even those whose Christian faith is robust enough to embrace the traditional view of nature as fallen—allowing them to insist that God did not create cancer nor does He send tsunamis—seem left with the equally counter-intuitive view of nature as abandoned to corruption and devoid of grace, when it is plain to every soul that has not turned its back on poetry altogether that nature still, despite its being "bleared" and "smeared," nevertheless retains its original goodness and beauty and holiness, can still allow God's grandeur to "flame out." The concept of Sophia, understood as the "original creation" that still underlies the blight of sin and fallenness—i.e., the understanding of Sophia that I believe we find in Dostoevsky and Florensky—allows us to affirm the seemingly contradictory claims that nature is indeed fallen and corrupted, while still remaining *kalos*, both good and beautiful, as primordially proclaimed on each day of creation in the Greek Septuagint.

Nature and Human Nature: Creation as Normative

Every student of ethics knows about the modern rejection of the socalled naturalistic fallacy—named by G.E. Moore in 1903, but based upon work by Hume two centuries earlier—rejecting the belief that one can derive "ought" from "is," that the way things *are* can be prescriptive for the way things *ought to be*. But neither Athens nor Jerusalem considered this to be fallacious at all. Throughout the Old Testament, and especially in the Wisdom Books, nature is held up as exemplary and edifying. Nor is it accidental that Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, asks us to emulate the

---

[11] For "the holy" as the highest order of axiology, see Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973) pp. 93 f.

[12] William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams: Volume II, 1939–1962*, ed. Christopher MacGowan, (New York: New Directions, 2001) p. 426.

birds of the sky and the flowers of the field. And nature was prescriptive for the ancient Greeks as well, as is perhaps most evident in the Stoic commitment to living in accord with *physis* or nature, which they in turn identified with the deity. Until recently in the West, this view was associated with natural law theory, which claims that ethical norms can be based upon our understanding of the natural order, a view that, while rooted in Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, is often associated with Thomas Aquinas. Unhappily, the belief in natural law is a decidedly minority view in philosophical ethics, jurisprudence, and even popular opinion. Why is this the case?

The first reason, I believe, derives from the fact that we have so much information about natural history. Yes, living species care for their young—except for those cases in which the young get devoured by their parents. Yes, individual beings do strive to preserve themselves in being, except when they are rhizomatic and possess no individual being to begin with. And so on. Skeptical science teachers delight in pointing out countless examples in which cruelty and indifference to all human valuations prevail in nature. Indeed, students are typically presented with a view of Darwinism in which violence and cunning prevail over cooperation, while young males justify promiscuity through invoking the sociobiology they have been taught in class, in which male sexuality is presented as the indiscriminate drive to inseminate a maximum number of females.

The second objection to natural law theory is perhaps more subtle, but even more decisive. In positing a realm of pure nature, upon which reason alone can found moral precepts, its adherents are promulgating something of a fiction. For as has been argued already, there is no realm of this sort. Or, rather, pure nature would be nothing other than the nature of natural science, stripped beforehand of all "values," and hence not only useless, but downright pernicious as a model for human behavior.[13] For only when we apprehend nature as divinely instituted, i.e. see it as creation, are we able to learn from it, to sense the light of divine wisdom interwoven throughout it and distinguish it from the darkness that infuses it. That is, only by means of *askēsis* (understood not primarily as fasting and vigils, but as purification of the heart) can nature be seen deeply and the divine wisdom reigning within it be revealed. And this is precisely the view we find in Dostoevsky, where characters fail to see any meaning in nature until their hearts are cleansed, until their souls begin to be set in order, until they learn how to love. And this insight, developed powerfully by Fr. Pavel Florensky in his *Pillar and Ground of the Truth,* is one of which we stand desperately in need today, in a dark age where traditional norms of human relationships are routinely mocked and discarded. An understanding of Sophia, then, or of some related set of ideas, is of the greatest importance for us today,

[13] For a horrifying look at a set of moral values based purely on empirical, scientific nature, see the diabolical masterpiece of the Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*. Indeed, Horkheimer and Adorno see this monstrous work as the ultimate, and most consistent, elaboration of the Enlightenment view of nature and its implications for human conduct, while Sade himself saw it as based squarely upon the materialistic understanding of nature in the French Encyclopedist Baron d'Holbach, especially his *Système de la Nature*. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "*Juliette* or Enlightenment and Morality," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, tr. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2002) pp. 63–93.

especially as we strive to learn how to live more harmoniously with what we call "nature," yet of whose ways, despite its claims, science alone cannot give us a sound understanding.

Nature as Original Creation

As a child during the last decades of the nineteenth century, Florensky experienced Batumi as a magical place, where nature seemed everywhere enchanted. It was the charmed setting where he first began to experience nature as brimming over with the mystery of divine wisdom. But now, a century and a quarter later, it is a major seaside resort for the Caucasus Republics and beyond to Turkey and Iran, as well as the primary port for oil piped in from the Caspian Sea. So I hardly expected that the enchantment would have lingered on. Nonetheless, here I stood upon the hotel balcony, looking out onto panoramas not just of the Black Sea with its tales of Jason and Medea, but also another one opening toward the lush mountains rising up from behind the city itself, cloud-covered like lofty Olympus and holy Athos. Yet these mountains were not stately sentinels of sacred space, but nascent and primal, enveloped in seething and roiling clouds, dynamic and animate, drawing in and out in acts of meteorological exhibitionism and metaphysical virtuosity. Clouds so massive and dense they looked tangible, yet so protean in their shape-shifting that they would have leapt out of the grip of any loutish giant seeking to clutch them. And in fact these cloud-ravished heights did look like places where mythical beings might still be stalking about. These clouds—so succulent that in their shadow, tea plantations are able to flourish here in the foothills of the Caucasus—seemed just as earthly as heavenly—brooding and reclusive, perhaps like those that must have just arisen on that second day of creation, when the Creator lifted up the expanse of land, and waters were first separated from other waters.

Eager to get up into those cloud-hidden mountains, I spent an afternoon exploring a vast arboretum and forest preserve—dating to the nineteenth century, and precariously clinging to a mountainside that sloped down steeply to the sea itself—where the prodigious, profligately verdant character of this land was fully evident, teeming with flora and fauna in a manner that evoked those protocols of early explorers in the New World that abounded with words like "paradise" and "Eden." Nature here—now fog-shrouded, now sunlit, in just the kind of place the young Florensky must have wandered rapt in wonder—was captivating not only in its abundance and variety and dramatic visage, but in the sense that here nature seems to be just now emerging from the hand of God, as in the first beginning, or flying up like a white dove released to find Mt. Ararat in that second beginning, when the world was once more purified and made new, sparkling and glistening, and all good things once again seemed possible.

Thinking back to his childhood years in Batumi, when he was "still nestled close to the life of nature," Florensky recalls that what he loved most "was air, wind, clouds, my brothers were cliffs, my spiritual kindred minerals, specially crystals. I

loved birds, and most of all growing things and the sea… with all the power of my being, *I was in love with nature*."[14] However, it was not what philosophers would call empirical or positive nature that he loved, but something more, something deeper, more elemental: "I grew accustomed to seeing the roots of things. That habit of vision later grew though all my thought and defined its basic character—the will to move along verticals and a certain indifference to horizontals."[15] In these reflections, we find interconnected thoughts that lie at the center of Florensky's philosophy. By means of *askēsis*, of repentance, of purification of the heart, we are able to break through the self-encrusted ego and, in an ecstatic act of loving and knowing, make contact with the very depths of creation, revealing those depths as only love can do. And this is precisely Florensky's fundamental concept of Sophia. Sophia is not "merely all creation." Rather, "Sophia is the Great Root by which creation goes into the intra-Trinitarian life [of divine love] and through which it receives Life Eternal from the One Source of Life. *Sophia is the original nature of creation*."[16] But the original nature of creation is its paradisiacal essence, nature as it issues from the hand of the Creator. As Florensky wrote in 1919, Sophia is "that spiritual aspect of being, one might call it a paradisiacal aspect, according to which there is as yet no knowledge of good and evil [but rather] there is only movement around God, a free playing in the presence of God…. like the sea playing in the sun."[17] Or again: "Sophia is essential Beauty in all of creation," and therefore "purity of heart… is the necessary condition for seeing Sophia-Wisdom."[18] And with these passages, we also return to the great theme of Elder Zosima: repentant souls learning how to love, and thereby discovering unexpectedly that they are now in paradise, finding that all is transfigured as its original nature is revealed. "Love all of God's creation," exhorts Elder Zosima, "both the whole of it, and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love animals, love plants, love each thing. If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in things."[19] This mystery, this depth in things, and in others, is for both Dostoevsky and Florensky, "paradise," "God's glory" surrounding us, if only we are able to see it.[20]

Florensky uses many images, or more properly "symbols" as he would put it—links bringing together (*syn)* into one *(holon)* what Kant had bifurcated into the phenomenal and the noumenal—to convey what he means by "Sophia." In a single sentence, he refers to Sophia as:

- the Heavenly Jerusalem

[14] Pavel Florensky, "On the Efimovs' Puppet Theatre," in Pavel Florensky, *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, ed. Nicolette Misler, (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 134; Pavel Florensky, *For My Children*, cited and translated in Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 5. Italics added.

[15] Florensky, *For My Children*, 7.

[16] PGT 237. Italics added.

[17] Florensky, "Celestial Signs," in *Beyond Vision,* 122.

[18] Ibid, 254.

[19] BK, 319.

[20] Ibid, 289.

- the Kingdom of God as the Ideal Person of Creation
- the Guardian Angel of Creation
- the world-creating thoughts of God
- the true pole and Incorruptible Aspect of creaturely being[21]

And many others follow. But I want to argue that they are all ways of speaking about this inner depth of creation, this beauty and mystery of creation that, parallel to certain characters in Dostoevsky's novels, Florensky encountered in his experience of nature and of other people. And if we take such concepts as statements of Christian doctrine, or attempts to build a systematic theology, rather than poetic articulations of noetic experience, not only will they fall into impossible contradiction with one another, but we will misunderstand Florensky's entire project in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, a book whose first sentence insists that "living religious experience [is] the sole legitimate way to gain knowledge of dogmas," and adds that "only by relying on immediate experience can one survey the spiritual treasures of the Church and come to see their value."[22]

Why the Concept of Sophia Is Problematic

The modern inaugurator of sophiological reflection, Vladimir Solovyov, also based his concept of Sophia on powerful, unforgettable experiences. But unlike Florensky's nature mysticism and Bulgakov's parallel and oft-cited experience of the Caucasus Mountains at sunset, Solovyov's experiences are, from the Orthodox point of view, highly suspect. For what he describes are not mystical experiences or noetic insights, but rather visionary interactions with a certain being named Sophia, visions (three of them) in which Sophia, who seems very much like a goddess, reveals to Solovyov as her follower a set of teachings. But in the tradition of Orthodox spiritual guidance, the consistent teaching is that such visions are most likely harbingers of *prelest* or spiritual delusion, and one must not seek them out, but rather assume until proven otherwise that their source is not divine at all, but rather demonic. Monks who report that Christ or the Mother of God have appeared to them in a vision are routinely advised to subject these visions to critical questioning and accept them only if they withstand scrutiny.

Nor are the occasions of these three visions at all auspicious. The first occurs when, during Divine Liturgy, the adolescent Solovyov is daydreaming about a girl with whom he is infatuated. The second vision takes place (during a period when Solovyov was practicing automatic writing and the "channeling of spirits") in the Reading Room of the British Museum, where he was doing research into Gnosticism, Hermeticism, and Occultism. And the third unfolds in the Sahara Desert near the Pyramids of Giza, themselves connected to the worship of Osiris, Egyptian god of

[21] PGT, 241.

[22] PGT, 5.

death. Indeed, given Solovyov's lifelong interest in Gnosticism, theosophy, and the occult, one wonders whether this was a vision of the Sophia named in the Old Testament Wisdom Books, of rather a vision of Isis or Persephone, both identified with the Gnostic Sophia.[23] (The first major articulation of Blavatsky's theosophy was entitled *Isis Unveiled*.) Nor can these visions be dismissed as merely allegorical. As Avril Pyman relates, the generations of Russian intellectuals succeeding Solovyov in the quest for Sophia, many of whom knew him personally, all agreed upon one thing: these were real visions, representing genuine contact, with an actual supernatural entity named Sophia.[24] Thus, an element of goddess worship enters the tradition of sophianic inquiry from the very beginning and it is doubtful whether it is ever truly overcome.

But there are philosophical and theological problems here as well. For to the extent that Sophia is hypostasized, either as an individual person (a goddess), or as the world soul, or as a Fourth Hypostasis alongside the Three Persons of the Trinity (a proposal with its own, special problems), another reality is placed between God and the world. And the traditional name for this practice is idolatry. If there is a higher order of reality (x) that is closer to us than God Himself, does it not follow that we should worship (x) rather than God? Or, perhaps, worship both (x) and God? Indeed, this is the logic of the golden calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai, where God seems too distant, too inaccessible and indeed somewhat dubious, and the people demand a deity that is closer, more approachable, more reliable. This is the problem of any *metaxu*—Plato's term for a connecting link *between* the visible and the invisible, and upon which Bulgakov draws in his exposition of Sophia—i.e. of anything standing between God and Creation. For rather than connecting God and Creation, it tends instead, like the moon in a solar eclipse, to block the very source of Light itself. John Milbank, in his defense of Sophia, sees this problem clearly: "Between God and Creation then, there is no between. To suppose so would be idolatry."[25] Yet, within the framework of Western theology and its rejection of the Eastern understanding of divine energies, there seems to him no other way to bring God and Creation together. To resolve this dilemma, Milbank resorts to a formula that seems as arbitrary as it is incomprehensible: "Sophia names a *metaxu* which does not lie between two poles but rather remains simultaneously at both poles at once. As such

[23] The great Church historian Georges Florovsky, who knew him personally, argued that Solovyov's Sophia was that of "Valentinus and Cabbala," and complained that he had "pushed Russian society on the path of fascination with Gnosticism and theosophy." Cited in Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 102 f. As subsequent studies have shown, however, Russian society in the late nineteenth century was already quite fascinated with esotericism of this kind and hardly needed pushing from Solovyov. See, for example, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[24] Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 228 f.

[25] John Milbank, "Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon," in Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneinder, eds., *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 64.

it does not subsist before the two poles, but it co-arises with them such that they can only exist according to a mediated communication which remains purely occult, a matter of utterly inscrutable affinity."[26]

Moreover, a "between" of any sort does violence to our experience of God in nature and our discourse about it. If I look upon a beautiful landscape and say that it displays the divine wisdom, I do not mean that the beauty manifests some intermediate layer between God and world called "divine wisdom," which I must subsequently relate back to God. I simply mean that it is God Himself in His wisdom that I am experiencing. Likewise, if like Zosima's brother I say that the divine mystery addresses me through the singing of the birds, I don't mean that some hypostatic being called Mystery is singing and speaking—a being who would in fact merit my worship, were this the case. Rather, I mean that it is God Himself in His mystery that I am encountering.

Metaphysically, this too much resembles the concept of emanation in Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism, from which sources it is in fact partially imported. From the One a metaphysical layer of Nous emanates, and from the Nous emanates the Soul (and above all, the World Soul), and from the Soul the Visible World that we inhabit. To a given emanation, only the next highest emanation is directly connected, relegating access to the One to anointed philosophers who can contemplatively climb the metaphysical ladder, leaving the Visible World behind, and doubtless rendering them (as Plotinus was said to be) ashamed of their own bodies.

Finally, both Florensky and Bulgakov maintain that Sophia reveals the very content of the divine essence. But this will not do. First, as Lossky points out, Wisdom is only one divine name among many that we know (such as Love, Being, Power, Justice, and Life) and no doubt innumerable others that we can neither experience nor know, no one of which can contain the divine fullness.[27] But second, any claim to comprehend the divine essence entails problems that are especially onerous for Orthodox theology, whose strong commitment to apophaticism insists that the divine essence is profoundly unknowable, forever mysterious, even to the highest ranks of the angelic orders. For a knowable God, a God whom we can know as He knows Himself, is a God who is commensurate with human knowledge, a God of our own size and commensurate with our own concepts, i.e. an idol.

Do we really want, it might well be asked, to exhaust, or even compromise, the mystery of God, should that somehow be possible? Would we even want to exhaust the mystery of a human person we love, stripping them of the possibility of surprising us, of leaving us in wonder, of continuing to inhabit a mystery that forever preserves them from being reduced to our own knowledge of them? Is it not of the very essence of a person not to be entirely known, even by that person himself? But if the very content of the divine essence has been delivered into Sophia, this would be precisely the result. As we came to understand God within the Wisdom layer that hovers above this finite world, we would become increasingly melancholy as we gradually exhausted the mystery of the divine essence. Must we not say that the

[26] Ibid, 50.

[27] Lossky, 80.

mystery of God is utterly inexhaustible, and that we can no more progress toward a complete knowledge of the divine essence than we can make any progress in enumerating an infinite series, i.e. in counting up to infinity?

How (Not) to Speak of Sophia

But if God cannot be known in His essence *(ousia),* this does not mean that He cannot be known.

1. In Eastern Christianity, it has always been affirmed that God is everywhere present and knowable in His energies (*energeiai*), His activity or operation or work (*ergon*) in the world. For a person, any person, is present to varying degrees within his activity. A singer is present in her singing, as is the songwriter. I hear a woman singing on the radio, and I say "that's Baez." I recognize her. Or I can just as truthfully say, "that's Dylan." For if Baez sings Dylan, both are present in the singing—both are personally present. I glimpse a painting in an antique store and breathlessly whisper, "that's Van Gogh! I would recognize him anywhere." It is Dylan himself that I hear. And Baez herself. And Van Gogh himself that I see. Not representations of these human creators, but the persons themselves whom I recognize.[28] How much more, then, would the Almighty Creator be present Himself within the continuous activity of His creation? As St Gregory of Nyssa put it, God "is invisible by nature, but becomes visible in His energies… ."[29] If we have eyes to see, i.e. if our hearts are purified, we can discover God in all things, even through the crust of sin and corruption and fallenness. "The spiritual world of the invisible is not some infinitely far off kingdom," Florensky insists; "instead, it everywhere surrounds us as an ocean…. But we, from the habit of immature spiritual sight" he continues, "fail even to assume it exists, and therefore we only sense unclearly in our hearts the spiritual currents of what is really happening around us."[30]
2. As the Prologue to St. John's Gospel proclaims, God creates the world through the Logos, through his Eternal Word. Correspondingly, as has been maintained

[28] My example here is drawn from the contemporary Greek philosopher, Christos Yannaras, who points to the remarkable fact that in the work of art we can actually encounter the very person of the creator who has invested himself in the work (Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, tr. Norman Russell [Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007) pp. 167–172. But already in the fourth century, we can find a similar claim in St Gregory of Nyssa, who points to "human works of art where, in a way, the mind can perceive the maker of the product that is before it," St Gregory of Nyssa, *The Beatitudes*, in Helda Graef, tr. *St Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer & The Beatitudes,* Ancient Christian Writers Vol. 18, (New York: Newman Press, 1954) p. 146. But it must be emphasized that this analogy is limited: the presence of God in His energies infinitely exceeds that of the human artist in his created work.

[29] St Gregory of Nyssa, p. 147.

[30] Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, tr. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 64.

at least since St. Maximus the Confessor, at the deepest ground of each being, there lies a unique *logos*, something that God has to say, something noetically intelligible and utterly unrepeatable. Each thing, "every little leaf" has an inexhaustible meaning, is an expression of the Word of God underlying all things. And in loving them, as Zosima prescribes, we are loving the Word expressed within them. Florensky explicitly draws upon this teaching in his exposition of Sophia, citing St. Clement of Alexandria, in whom we can already find the teaching of divine *logoi* articulated: "Before our creation we therefore existed in the thought of God, we who later turned out to be intelligent creatures of the Divine Word. Thanks to Him, we are very ancient in our origin, because 'in the beginning was the Word.'"[31]

3. That which is instituted by God's Word was originally in Greek named *ktisis* or creation. And still today what we call "nature" can be better understood as creation—that which God brings into being though his Word, the discourse of God that generates our world. The linguistic element is fundamental here. For the Greek *ktisis* signifies what is brought into being through its being spoken, something like the "performative utterence" as understood in analytic philosophy, where the words "with this ring I thee wed" do not denote an already existing state of affairs, but rather bring that state of affairs (marriage) into being. In contrast to *ktisis* is *demiourgeia*, which is predicated of something made or produced, as a craftsman makes a finished product. And it is *ktisis* that is consistently used, in both the Septuagint Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, to denote creation as what is instituted by the Word of God. Creation, then, is less like a finished product and more like a proclamation being issued, something far more personal and far more evocative of the speaker—something that is indeed inhabited by the speaker.
4. The divine wisdom, then, could be understood as that within which the speaking of God coheres—the syntax of creation, its ordering (*taxis*) into something like verse and meter, stanza, chapter, and book—as well as the element of divine beauty or glory (*doxa*) that surrounds it, vouchsafing its origin.[32] Apprehending original creation would then be understood as something like the revealing and restoration of a text corrupted by moth or mold, or having been roughly translated from one language into another until its original beauty and order have become obscure. And I believe that most of what Florensky argues with regard to Sophia as original creation is quite compatible with this ancient notion of the divine wisdom ordering, and radiating from, creation as *ktisis*. Indeed, his final restatement at the end of the "Sophia" chapter employs precisely this language, while suggesting (as does Dostoevsky in *Karamazov*) that this revealing has an eschatological significance: "Sophia, the *true Creation* or *Creation in the Truth*, is a preliminary hint at the transfigured, spiritualized world as the manifestation,

[31] St Clement of Alexandria, cited in PGT, 239.

[32] "'That everything is fitting' *[kata taxin]* is precisely what constitutes the beauty of creation, as well as its good and its truth," Florensky, PGT, 132.

imperceptible for others, of the heavenly in the earthly."[33] But if this is the case, why risk the dangers of introducing the concept of Sophia, novel or marginal to both Eastern and Western traditions, with its questionable history and problematic implications?

5. Finally, what is said is always to one degree or another an image or *eikōn* of the speaker, expressing the speaker without necessarily resembling him. The Byzantine or Russian icon is made (or "written," as it is commonly said) to promote a kind of double seeing, a seeing in which we see through one thing (the image) in order to see another (the original). This double seeing was what the ancient Greeks called *eikasia*, or imagination, and it differed from *phantasia*, the production of *phantasmata*, the mere products of fancy or fantasy.[34] Like the shadow or mirror image—which we must "see through" if we are to see it truly, i.e. see that it is "cast" by something else, and thereby see the original through it—the *eikōn* in the proper sense is less a representation (*Vorstellung* in German) than a presentation (*Darstellung*) in which the original itself is brought forth, just as a performance of Hamlet is not a representation of the play, but rather a presentation of the play itself. Thus, creation can be seen as itself iconic, as God's first presentation of His Word, i.e. of Himself.[35] Creation can in this case be seen as presenting to us the very face or countenance or presence (*prosōpon*) of God, as is the case throughout the poetry of the Psalms.

But if God is present in creation as His own energies or activities; as the *logos* of each entity that makes it what it is, as something that God has to say; as the created order itself, in its coherence and wisdom and beauty; and as the original that is always present in the image, it would hardly seem necessary to resort to Sophia in order to mediate between God and world. As I have argued, this is not simply a matter of philosophical parsimony, but of avoiding serious theological and philosophical problems. Andrew Louth, in defense of Russian sophiology, has acknowledged that everything that is said through the concept of Sophia might well be said in more traditional ways. But how, he asks, would we then be able "to understand the coherence and mutual entailments" of the correlative concepts and "assertions"? But is a

[33] PGT, 283, italics added.

[34] The most important source in ancient philosophy for this understanding of *eikasia* is the "divided line" exegesis in Plato's *Republic*, where the "double-seeing" of an original through the image is used as a model for each step proceeding up the divided line to the highest step of the forms or *eidē* themselves. And even the latter are ultimately images of what in Plato is variously called the Good, the One, or the Same, and which Church Fathers understood as Plato's intuition of God. My reading of Plato has, in turn, been influenced by several works of former teachers and mentors: see Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), especially pp. 112–115; Eva Brann, *The Music of the Republic: Essays on Socrates' Conversations and Plato's Writings* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry, 2011), especially pp. 172–175; 188–194, 338–343; and John Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), especially pp. 418–422.

[35] For my understanding of creation as iconic, see Bruce V. Foltz, "The Iconic Earth: Nature Godly and Beautiful," Chapter Six of Foltz, *The Noetics of Nature: Environmental Philosophy and the Holy Beauty of the Visible* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014) pp. 113–157.

single concept, such as Sophia, in fact the best manner to accomplish this anyway? Fr. Louth in fact proposes (without endorsing) an appealing answer to his own question in the suggestion that the "liturgical inspiration" that we find in Bulgakov's philosophical theology can bind together these concepts.[36] Perhaps. And no doubt the traditional Name of Divine Wisdom (without the Sophia encumbrances) needs to be much better developed, something Florensky tried to do in his later research on space, time, mathematics, and natural science. For as St. Dionysius readily acknowledges in his *Divine Names*, Wisdom (or Sophia) is indeed a Name of God, allowing us to know God kataphatically, through His energies.

Perhaps the most successful applications of sophianic thinking are Bulgakov's *Philosophy of Economy* and Florensky's *Iconostasis*. In the former, Bulgakov very powerfully contrasts a sophianic economy (which reveals the divine goodness and beauty inherent in creation) to a diabolical economy (which does the opposite, obscuring and debasing and disfiguring original creation).[37] But would not a broader philosophical and theological articulation of creation as *ktisis* serve the same purpose, and in fact lead more productively to further modes of "coherence and mutual entailment" beyond those enumerated by Bulgakov? And in *Iconostasis*, his last published work, Florensky shows through art history how Western modes of thought and perception have served to sever heaven and earth, while the concept of the icon plays the role of linking them, without recourse to a between-element or any direct reference to Sophia at all. For the connection between image *(eikōn)* and original is primal and ontological—the very being of an image is to be referential, to be ontologically transitive—without requiring any kind of a *metaxu* or "between" as a mediator. Moreover, the writings of both authors abound with rich, phenomenological accounts of the beauty of creation, and of the divine wisdom displayed in the astounding interconnectedness of every aspect of creation. I believe that there is much work to be done in assimilating these texts, which stand with the work of Scheler, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty as presenting the finest phenomenological research of the last century. A phenomenological, descriptive catalogue of the many modes of divine wisdom manifested in the world—a contemporary correlate to the bounteous expositions of divine wisdom woven throughout the Psalms and other Wisdom Books of scripture—would do much toward reclaiming the experienced world (the *Lebenswelt* of phenomenology) that we can rightfully claim as our truly human inheritance—encounter as *ktisis* or creation, rather than as a scientific object or a technological resource.

Surely the problems that Sophia seeks to remedy are important and even urgent. Like Russia at the turn of the twentieth century—its Church first weakened by the Old Believer Schism and then the Westernizing impositions and confiscations of the Romanov Czars—the West today is caught between powerful but inchoate spiritual yearnings and religious institutions that seem incapable of meeting them. This

[36] Louth, p. 57.

[37] On Sophia in this text of Bulgakov, see Bruce V. Foltz, "The Resurrection of Nature: Environmental Metaphysics in Sergei Bulgakov's *Philosophy of Economy*," Chapter Five of Foltz, *Noetics of Nature*.

situation constitutes perhaps the strongest reason for endorsing a bold claim made by John Milbank: “At the dawn of the 21st century, it increasingly appears that the most significant theology of the two preceding centuries has been that of the Russian sophiological tradition.”[38] But it remains unclear whether the concept of Sophia is what will best address these urgent issues, especially given its controversial status in both orthodox Christian and Orthodox Christian circles. Perhaps the problems of sophiology that I have outlined, along with others that could easily be added, can all be surmounted. But in the meantime, I believe that the concepts of divine energies, of divine *logoi* in creation, of the ancient notion of creation as *ktisis*, of the Divine Wisdom in nature, and of iconic creation—all more traditional, better integrated into existing doctrine, and I believe inherently richer concepts—are more promising options to be further articulated and more fully developed.

[38] Milbank, 45.

Chapter Eight Discerning the Spirit in Creation: Orthodox Christianity and Environmental Science

The major problems of public policy today (both national and international) are increasingly connected to environmental issues. Pollution, population, energy, and climate change all call into question our relation to nature, a relation that seems to many to have become deeply problematical. And it seems likely that environmental issues will continue to preoccupy us throughout the current century, most likely at an accelerating rate. But can Orthodox Christianity teach us anything important about the natural environment and our relation to it? We live in a modern age, an age of science and technology, where even the most ancient questions of birth and life and death are given scientific formulations and technological solutions. Surely problems explicitly involving nature itself should properly be defined and analyzed by the natural sciences, and addressed by the technologies that the sciences of nature have made possible—not pondered over using traditional ways of thinking that, according to many environmentalists, have not just been scientifically discredited, but that bear much of the blame for generating the very problems themselves. This is to say that it has long been common in environmental circles to place much of the blame for our present-day environmental woes specifically upon Christianity itself and its attitudes toward nature.

Orthodox Christians, however, whose sensibilities toward nature have long been oriented aesthetically and sacramentally—i.e. toward seeing what St Isaac of Syria called "the glory of God hidden in creation"—will find this indictment to be uninformed and counter-intuitive, and they will want to know how it can possibly be justified. The criticism typically makes three charges:

First, it is argued that Christianity envisions God as a distant being who completely transcends the world—who subsists in some other dimension, or resides perhaps in a faraway place called "heaven." This, in turn, is seen as demeaning to the earth and to all that is visible and nearby: the tree outside my window, the ground beneath my feet, the sky overhead. Better, it is claimed, to follow the counsel of John Lennon who (glossing Nietzsche) exhorted us to "Imagine there's no heaven. Above us, only sky."

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019
B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_8

Second, it is believed that since Christianity affirms that human beings are created "in the image of God," it directs us to transcend, godlike, the visible world, leading us to feel alienated from earthly reality, superior to nature, and therefore entitled to treat earthly things in a careless, insensitive, or selfish manner. Better, argue some environmentalists, to see human beings as one more animal species among others, nothing special except perhaps for the arrogance and destructiveness deriving from our belief that we are in fact special.

Thirdly, it follows that when nature is seen to have an inferior status—with its physical, material being constituting an ontological deficit—we are bound to mistreat it, especially in comparison to other cultural and religious views, many of which have seen corporeal nature as in one sense or another sacred. Better to assume a more materialist worldview, along with a more naturalistic religion. If there is nothing but matter, if the earth is all there is, then perhaps we need an earthbound religion. Some new kind of paganism, it is thought, will restore better attitudes to the natural environment.

Is there some truth to these charges? Or is this just another example of the fashionable tendency to blame Christianity for everything that is unfashionable? And are the modern prescriptions, the fashionable alternatives, themselves sound, or do they present their own, unanticipated, dangers?

There is little doubt that some versions of Christianity, in certain times and places, have lent support to some of these charges, not just in Christian aberrations under the influence of Gnosticism or Neoplatonism, but also in Western modernity as influenced by Descartes and other proponents of metaphysical dualism. But things are quite different with regard to traditional Christianity, the undivided Church of the first millennium—and even now with regard to its continuation in the tradition of Byzantine Christianity and its heirs in Greece and Cyprus and the Balkans, in Russia and the Slavic Lands, and in the Middle Eastern traditions of Antioch and Alexandria, all of which are very much alive, not just in the "Old Country," but in North America today. If we look carefully at the concept of creation in Orthodox Christianity, we can find not just that all three of these charges are unfounded, but that it was in fact through a departure from this traditional understanding of creation by the modern West that our environmental problems were first generated—i.e. that the problem begins not with the Christian tradition, but with its abandonment. It would therefore come as no surprise if within the teachings and practices of the Ancient Church, we were able to find not just the resources for an insightful diagnosis of our environmental problems and a corresponding etiology of their causes, but a powerful prescription for healing as well— a therapy for treating what has arguably become in the West, and increasingly worldwide, a chronically dysfunctional and adversarial relationship between humanity and nature.

All this would require a re-appraisal of much of what we take for granted about nature and environment and how we speak about them, an ambitious task that in a single article can only be outlined at best.[1] But even a brisk overview will require

[1] More comprehensive treatments can be found in John Chryssavgis, *Beyond the Shattered Image,* Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1999; Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox*

certain critical prerequisites. For discussions concerning the natural environment have been largely shaped by scientific concepts that are taken to be neutral and "value-free," yet which bring with them powerful metaphysical commitments—a myopia that I will maintain is itself a primary cause of the very problems we seek to understand.

A concrete example of the obstacles to approaching these issues, problems that are rooted in everyday linguistic usage, may be helpful in making this point. When we use the term "environment" to describe the kinds of problems we face, it sounds harmless and neutral. It is handy, so we take it up and use it. But this word has several presuppositions attached to it that can legitimately be questioned. To think of the natural world as an "environment" carries with it conceptual presuppositions, including an essentially materialist view of human life. Its current usage has been strongly influenced not just by Darwinian *science*—which I do not wish to challenge—but by a Neo-Darwinian *metaphysics*, which understands all life-forms only as they are adaptive to their surroundings, and thus as shaped exclusively by those surroundings or environments. (It is worth noting that Darwin himself cautioned against taking his views concerning natural selection as the basis for a comprehensive or exhaustive view of life.)[2]

The concept of environment has been further molded by the German notion of "*Umwelt*," literally the "surrounding world" or "environing world"—a term popularized by the German ethologist Jakob Von Uexküll, who saw each life-form as occupying its own, unique perceptual universe that is closed off to others.[3] The bee, for example, lives in an ultraviolet *Umwelt*, and the rudimentary environment of the common tick (both blind and deaf) correlates to nothing more than its sensitivities for the odor of butyric acid (emitted by hair follicles) and the temperature of 37 °C (the blood temperature for mammals). Thus, to see the world as our "environment" carries a host of assumptions not just about nature, but about human beings as shaped and determined only by their surroundings, and perceptually limited by them, quite like the tick, even if more complexly. And the later, cybernetic concept of the environment as a self-regulating system, composed of information bits within feedback loops, is if anything even more reductionistic, when appropriated without qualification, as is often the case. (Indeed, environmental writers often exult in a

---

Perspectives on Ecology, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009; and John Chyrssavgis and Bruce Foltz, editors, *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

[2] "As my conclusions have been lately much misrepresented, and it has been stated that I attribute the modification of species exclusively to natural selection, I may be permitted to remark that in the first edition of this work, and subsequently, I placed in a most conspicuous position—namely, at the close of the introduction—the following words: 'I am convinced that natural selection has been the main, but *not the exclusive means of modification*.' This has been of no avail. Great is the power of steady misrepresentation." Charles Darwin, cited in "Mr. Wallace on Darwinism," Editorial, *Science*, vol. 14, American Association for the Advancement of Science, August 30, 1889, p. 151, italics added.

[3] Von Uexküll's *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere* has been recently reissued in its original German (Nabu Press, 2010).

sense of oceanic immersion and absorption into a larger "system" that is felt to exhibit a homeostatic "intelligence" higher than human intelligence—a very dubious *Ersatz* for the genuine reverence often exhibited by traditional peoples in their experience of divine wisdom and providence in nature.)

Thus, if this way of looking at the world as an "environment" is taken as the last word, as reality itself—rather than as a limited, provisionally useful frame of reference—we will fail to understand some of the most basic principles not just of traditional Christianity, but of all three great theistic traditions in the West, not to mention most philosophical understandings of humanity prior to modernity: that human beings are created by God, not just elicited by their "environment"; and that in some important sense they transcend that surrounding world not only by their relation to God, but by their ability to know the world, and to act freely in relation to it, and not just blindly react to environmental stimuli. The poet and agrarian writer Wendell Berry makes this point well:

> The problem, as it appears to me, is that we are using the wrong language. The language we use to speak of the world and its creatures, including ourselves, has gained a certain analytical power (along with a lot of expertish pomp) but has lost much of its power to designate *what* is being analyzed or to convey and respect or care or affection or devotion toward it. As a result we have a lot of genuinely concerned people calling upon us to "save" a world which their language simultaneously reduces to an assemblage of perfectly featureless and dispirited "ecosystems," "organisms," "environments," "mechanisms," and the like. It is impossible to prefigure the salvation of the world *in the same language by which the world has been dismembered and defaced*.[4]

So perhaps we should substitute the word more traditional word "nature" instead? But this term is if anything even more problematic, its history much longer and more complex. It renders, and conceptually draws upon, the Greek concept of *physis* and its subsequent translation by the Latin *natura*. For the ancient Greeks, *physis* was ultimately a blind and impersonal force, indifferent to humanity—a brute reality to which we are compelled to conform, indifferent to human goodness and virtue, a "blind necessity (*anankē*)" which always threatens to overwhelm us.[5] As with the concept of "environment," there is an important truth here too, and we can indeed experience the world in this way—especially during storms and other catastrophes. But for the traditional Christian, it must be contextualized by the more inclusive concept of creation, *ktisis* in Greek. To see the world as *ktisis*, as creation, is to see it as having an inherent *taxis* or order that has been divinely instituted and sustained, and that is moreover perceptible, intelligible, and generally commensurate with human existence. Creation is not just overwhelming and irresistible; it also makes sense in a way that resonates with human existence. (Indeed, it has been argued by intellectual historians that Western thought required the

---

[4] Wendell Berry, *Life Is a Miracle: An Essay against Modern Superstition,* New York: Counterpoint, 2001, p. 8. Italics added.

[5] Cf Gerard Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature,* Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2005, pp. 163ff. Naddaf concludes that the identification of *physis* with necessity culminates the traditions not only of the Presocratic *physikoi,* but also of the Sophists, for whom it was taken as grounds for their claims regarding the conventional basis of human law and virtue.

concept of creation for the rise of natural science to be possible). And more importantly, creation is deeply coordinate to human beings, to their needs and hopes and dreams—not merely overpowering like the Greek concept of nature, but a fundamentally congenial abode fashioned by a beneficent Creator. We are ultimately, even if not at every particular moment, *at home* in the world as creation, for we were created as coordinate to it, as were all living things, for whom God has in each case has provided in His Providence. The Psalmist sings this with beautiful simplicity: "The eyes of all of all look to Thee with hope, and thou gavest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand and fillest every living thing with thy favor." (Psalm 144/145:15–16)[6] Nor has this providential order of creation been thought to be limited to what we can consciously grasp. Its ineffable beauty and unfathomable magnificence quietly, and sometimes without our fully noticing it, provide us with our initial and indeed, our baseline knowledge of the Creator, a knowledge that is aesthetic before it becomes conceptual. "Creation's being is God's pleasure, creation's beauty God's glory; beauty reveals the shining of an uncreated light, a Taboric effulgence, upon all things," maintains Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart, and therefore he adds that "only in loving creation's beauty—only in seeing that creation truly is beauty—does one apprehend what creation is."[7] The world understood as creation always points beyond itself, if only we have eyes to see. Or so it has seemed to the tradition of ancient Christianity.

Yes, we can see the world as merely a habitat or "environment," and this way of understanding can be helpful for certain purposes of "environmental management," such as addressing questions about how to control the deer population next season. And yes, we can regard creation as sheer "nature" as well, as we work to master its potentially overpowering forces, reinforcing buildings in San Francisco or levees in New Orleans. But Orthodox Christians (and together with them, those embracing certain other traditionally anchored modes of theistic religion) will emphasize that it is important not to loose sight of the more important, deeper, more inclusive view of the world as creation, as God-given legacy, and of ourselves as God-gifted, gifted not simply by the gift of creation, but even more by the way that God gives Himself by means of the gift.

Here as elsewhere, it is important to see that words matter, that ideas have consequences, that it is not just an academic affectation to try our best to speak and think clearly, choosing our words carefully. For example, during the Latin Middle Ages, scholastic philosophers began to base their understanding of creation on pagan Greek and Roman concepts of "nature," originally drawn from Aristotle. Creation was seen as an independent substance, a self-contained reality *(the natural)* that could be understood on its own terms, even apart from a higher reality *(the super-natural),* which could nevertheless be "infused" into it from outside. But this lent itself easily to a further development. By the end of the scholastic period, with

[6] *The Psalter According to the Seventy, of St David, the Prophet and King*, translated by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA: 1997.

[7] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, pp. 252 f.

William of Ockham, nature had been metaphysically severed from the realm of grace and holiness and divine wisdom altogether, and thus for all intents from a deity who had become largely otiose anyway. The great Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky expresses how alien this conception had become to the traditional, Orthodox view—the view of ancient Christian spirituality and theology: "The Eastern tradition knows nothing of 'pure nature' to which grace is added as a supernatural gift. For it, there is no natural or 'normal' state, since grace is implied in the act of creation itself… 'Pure nature,' for Eastern theology, would thus be a philosophical fiction."[8] The Western Church, and along with it to varying degrees Western philosophy and science as well, has subsequently suffered from innumerable confusions whose source lies in the uncritical appropriation of this substantialist conception of nature.

The ancient Christian experience of the world of earth and sky, of plants and animals and landscape, was something very different. This difference is rooted in an affinity for creation that is articulated eloquently in Wisdom Books of the Bible, and especially the Psalms, where the world around us is everywhere seen to be upheld by God, guided by the divine wisdom, in every place offering us a visible display of the Divine Goodness and Glory—a world that stands attentive to the divine command, reaches out to the divine hand, gives praise and prayer to its Creator. And in contrast to the nature or *physis* of the ancient Greeks, its existence is by no means something obvious and taken for granted. Rather, its very being—the fact that it *is* at all—is seen as wonderful; it is not experienced as brutally thrust forward, as overwhelming, but as delicate and wondrous in its being, rising up miraculously from the abyss of possibility, marvelously created before our eyes out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. The ancient Greeks and Romans could not imagine that the cosmos had not always existed, so forceful and overpowering did it seem to them. But the spiritual freedom that derives from Jerusalem, rather than from Athens, sees the cosmos as so dazzling and delightful and glorious that the faithful could only be awestruck and amazed that it existed at all. And so they came to see it as… *ex nihilo*.

Thus, it is not philosophical speculation, but lived experience—mystical experience to be sure, but poetic experience too—that forms the basis of Orthodox theology. And neither is this a rarified mode of experience—accessible only to those who had mastered Hesiod and Virgil, or Euclid and Archimedes—but the kind of heedful wonder that could be lived and articulated by a shepherd boy, such as David, or a merchant, such as Job, finally blessed by a marvelous vision of creation. Its prerequisites were, and remain, not cultural and intellectual, but existential and spiritual. This can be easily illustrated through recent examples in great saints and holy people, to whose reflections on nature we have access: people such as St Seraphim of Sarov, or more recently, St Porphyrius.

Porphyrios was one of the great holy men, sages, and wonder-workers of twentieth century Greece. His experience of creation is typical of the tradition of the Orthodox East, and can be found represented everywhere from the fourth century

[8]Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church,* Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976, p. 101.

Desert Fathers of Egypt to the modern monastics in the deep forests of the Russian *taiga*. "Take delight in all things that surround us," he exhorts. "All things teach us and lead us to God. All things around us are *droplets of the love of God*—things animate and inanimate, the plants and the animals, the birds and the mountains, the sea and the sunset and the starry sky. They are little loves through which we attain to the great Love that is Christ. Flowers, for example, have their own grace: they teach us with their fragrance, and with their magnificence. They speak to us of the love of God."[9] The entire chapter called "On Creation" in *Wounded by Love*, a collection of Porphyrius' writings, and from which this quote is taken, represents a remarkable expression of this experience of creation, one that stands in a rich continuity with the Psalms, the final passages of Job, and with the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus exhorts us to "consider the lilies of the field." And for understanding the Orthodox view of the natural environment, it is this living element of spirituality—not any set of concepts of theories that would be commensurate with those of the natural sciences—this experience of creation as revealing the divine providence and the divine glory, that is primary and fundamental.

But at the same time, it is important also to see how this living and essentially poetic experience of creation can be cultivated and grasped conceptually and put into prose, taking care not to be led astray by modern (and thus, anachronistic) terms and concepts. The understanding of the world as "creation" in ancient Christianity, which I am maintaining has been preserved intact in Eastern Orthodoxy, can be summarized in seven points, which can here be only briefly presented.

First, the Byzantine tradition has preserved the rich, cosmological scope of ancient Christianity, viewing both the Fall and its salvation as cosmically extending to all creation, to humanity and "nature" alike, and insisting that Christ's redemptive work was undertaken not just for the sake of human beings, but for the renewal of all creation, to reconcile heaven and earth. Correspondingly, Orthodoxy has preserved the patristic teaching that through the Fall of humanity, creation itself became disturbed and distorted as well, with suffering and death and corruption introduced into the world. As had already been grasped in ancient Judaism, the comely order of creation was held together by the bonds of an invisible, underlying unity, one that could be upset by human disorder, with the result that creation itself can become distorted and perverted.[10] As put by the Orthodox theologian George Florovsky, "man's apostasy estranges the whole creation from God, devastates it, and as it were, deprives it of God. The fall of man shatters the cosmic harmony."[11]

---

[9] Elder Porphyrios, *Wounded by Love: The Life and Writings of Elder Porphyrios*, Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey Publisher, 2005, p. 218.

[10] Cf Margaret Barker, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment,* London: T & T Clark, 2010: "The prophets and wise ones of Israel had a vision of the creation held in existence by a system of divine bonds, and when these were broken, creation began to disintegrate," p. 6. See also pp. 139ff.

[11] Georges Florovsky, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, *Vol. III, Creation and Redemption*, Belmont, MA: Nordland Publ., 1976, p. 106.

Meanwhile, the eclipse of this ancient truth has paralyzed much of Western Christianity, leaving it speechless and impotent whenever it is faced with cosmic evil: earthquakes and tsunamis and hurricanes. How could God create such a suffering world, we ask reflexively? But the traditional Christian answer, now starting to seem increasingly plausible in the West, even to the most secular observer, is that God didn't create it this way, that it is not working as it was intended to function at all, but that it is *malfunctioning* due to human misdeeds. (I note in passing that whatever the *actual* degree of human influence on global climate change turns out to be, its *possibility* was long ago understood in the ancient Christian notion of how human sinfulness disturbs and deranges creation.) And unlike the Western view that Christ's redemptive work is meant only for mankind, the East has always affirmed that it was intended to restore *all* creation to its authentic state—to its primal beauty and purity and perfection—to bring it back into the total transparency to God toward which, in the words of St Paul, it continues to "groan and travail" (Rom. 8:22).

Creation is not, then, just a stage or backdrop for the human drama. Rather, the struggle against darkness and evil and disorder has cosmic dimensions, a recognition toward which much fantasy literature (for example, in Tolkien's *Ring* Trilogy) reaches, which forms the basis for Confucian metaphysics, and which even Freud in his later meta-psychology (most notably, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*) explicitly maintained, however confusedly. Yet at the same time, the Orthodox East has remembered that there remain abundant goodness and purity even in a fallen world: that as Elder Porphyrios reminds us, if we are properly prayerful, we will discern with our own eyes and ears that all creation is praying along with us. This claim, found throughout scripture as well ubiquitous in the patristic writings, that all creation prays to God, worships and praises Him, is not understood as a metaphor, even if we are not meant to believe that inaudible sub-vocalizations are somehow taking place. "All beings turn toward Him," says Porphyrius, "albeit unconsciously."[12]

Second, Orthodoxy understands man's place in creation to be neither wholly immanent (as does the materialism typical of much environmentalism) nor wholly transcendent (as do the Gnostics and certain Western Christians). Rather, it understands humanity on the one hand to be very much a part of the created order, but on the other hand as a uniquely pivotal part, the central part, the microcosm within the macrocosm, and above all as the nodal point through which God chose to unite creation to Himself by the entering into it in Person. Indeed, it is only because humanity is so essential to creation that its Fall could entail the fall of the entire created order. And conversely, it is our charge to unite ourselves with the Risen Christ, that we may serve as a Royal Priesthood of Creation, uniting its divisions, consecrating its existence, and raising it up to God as an offering of love and thanksgiving. This is surely an anthropocentrism—implying a decisive rejection of "deep ecology" and all kinds of environmental misanthropy, which insist that humanity is merely another part of the whole—but it is a most noble and generous anthropocentrism, for our centrality consists in serving and consecrating and blessing, rather than in exploiting or ravaging. A tender and moving token of this role we are meant

[12] Pophyrios, p. 113.

to perform can be found in the countless tales of holy ascetics of the Eastern Church (and in the West, with St. Francis) from the earliest times to the present, consorting with wild animals, now tamed and unafraid, as if they were dear friends and family—St Seraphim with his friendly bear and Elder Paisios with his genial snakes. It is, then, only through us—united with Christ in whom the divisions have already been implicitly overcome—that the earth can be healed.

Third, Byzantine thought and spirituality have preserved and refined the ancient awareness of a higher kind of knowledge, a superior sort of rationality, than the calculative, inferential rationality that the modern West has one-sidedly embraced. The belief in such a higher mode of knowledge is common to virtually all humanity apart from Western modernity, which rejected the very possibility of this contemplative or noetic rationality. The only way to understand nature or anything else, we have long believed in the West, is through the discursive, inferential rationality that characterizes mathematics and the sciences. Or rather, this contemplative knowledge was abandoned by Western theology and philosophy. For in the arts, and especially in poetry, we find through the mid-twentieth century a sustained attempt to retrieve this way of knowing nature: Goethe in his theory of colors, William Blake in celebrating the imagination, the sympathetic knowledge of nature found in European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism. And it is important to recognize that environmentalism itself—as a movement, and even more as a sensibility—was initially founded not upon scientific writings—for these came later and lent support to what was already felt and intuited—but literary and poetic portrayals in writers such as Emerson and Thoreau, John Muir and John Burroughs, Annie Dillard and Barry Lopez. Moreover, all of these writers arrive at a very similar conclusion: that the aesthetic appreciation of nature leads beyond itself into an experience of transcendence—that the glow of earthly beauty is the holy trace of transcendent realities. In the visual arts we need look no further than the paintings of Georgia O'Keefe, or the photographs of Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, to see a similar dynamic. And even scientists such as Aldo Leopold were the most persuasive in their more lyrical and intuitive writings.

But this retrieval of a sacred, aesthetically charged aspect of creation, I believe, is largely a secularized (and partial) rediscovery of what in the Byzantine tradition has since the fourth century been called *theōria physikē*, the contemplation of nature. We should not, however, make this way of experiencing creation into just a technical term, something rarified and academic and exotic, for to one extent or another it is a capacity that we all share. We listen, once again, to Elder Porphyrius:

> For a person to become a Christian he must have a poetic soul. He must become a poet. Christ does not wish insensitive souls in His company. A Christian, albeit only when he loves, is a poet and lives amid poetry. Poetic hearts embrace love and sense it deeply. Make the most of beautiful moments. Beautiful moments predispose the soul to prayer; they make it refined, noble, and poetic. Wake up in the morning to see the sun rising from out of the sea as a king robed in regal purple. [And then] go beyond this to give glory for all beautiful things so that you experience Him who alone is *comely in beauty*. All things are holy—the

> sea, swimming, and eating. Take delight in them all. All things enrich us, all lead us to the great Love, all lead us to Christ.[13]

Fourth, it follows that the Orthodox life, when lived fully and richly and authentically, would be characterized by a profoundly sacramental relation to the visible, material world, leading us to be deeply, indeed mystically, attuned to the divine energies in the art and ritual of the Church (where the very re-union of Heaven and Earth is enacted in the Divine Liturgy) as well as in our everyday awareness of God's presence within the created order. Creation then spontaneously, effortlessly becomes apprehended as an image, an *eikōn* of God. And just as Orthodox Christians see written icons as windows to the invisible, so too creation becomes a transparent window. To the same degree, and with the same intensity? For the most part, I think not, nor would the kind of veneration owed to blessed and sanctified written icons normally be appropriate to plants or birds or meteorological events. Yet we would do well here to remember how the presence of God was manifest to Moses in a bush and to Job in the whirlwind, to recall "the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove," hovering high over the River Jordan—each one of them reminders that God can make Himself manifest anywhere, not just in the human face but in shrubs and breezes and birds, for nowhere is He ever absent. It is also true that human beings are icons in a privileged sense, and it is explicitly asserted by Holy Scripture that we are expressly created as icons or images of God—even to the extent of being able to manifest, in the words of St Paul, "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor 4:6) Yet the Orthodox Church does not limit its understanding of sacraments, or rather mysteries, to some particular number: Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, and so on, up to the number seven or more. Rather, it understands that the Spirit of God can be discerned, and encountered, everywhere at work in creation.

We experience the goodness of nature on a fine, crisp autumn morning or a gentle summer evening. But what is this goodness? What's so good about nature, or creation, or environment that we should concern ourselves with thinking much about it at this conference? Is it good just because we find it useful or pleasant? "What is *good* in nature," writes Porphyrios "is a *mystery*. Isn't a tiny flower that attracts you with its variegated colors and makes you love it beautiful? You approach it and it has such a delicate fragrance that it awakens your love even more. That is 'the good.' Of course it is, but isn't it also a mystery? How did these colors come about? How did that fragrance arise? The same can be said of the birds, the animals and sea creatures. All express the goodness of God."(191f) How did these things come about, the mysterious goodness of creation ever prompts us to ask? Yet aren't these really problems better answered by biologists and chemists? How easily we in the modern West, educated products of a purported Age of Enlightenment, forget the difference between a problem and a mystery—between a problem we work to solve in order to move on, and a mystery that we strive to enter into ever more deeply! How marginalized has become the mystical consciousness which sees into and "through" creation contemplatively, reaching toward the mystery at play within it! Yet this

[13] Ibid. 218.

incapacity for mystery, or perhaps refusal of it, is deeply rooted in Western philosophy and theology, which long ago came to assert that this kind of seeing was nothing more than a product of human fancy, and which can no longer entertain the possibility that this contemplative knowledge might be truer, deeper, and indeed more "environmentally" salutary than the detached, objective knowledge of the sciences. Too often, "environmentalism" exhibits not the warm heart of the contemplative soul, but the cool comportment of scientific rationality, thereby misconstruing the very object of its study, just by considering it neutrally, indifferently as an object—even when the most heated passions, the most strident calls to action are added on later, once the data is sifted and processed. But is it not possible that creation is not primarily *data* at all, and that to apprehend it as such is already to distort what is seen, to retreat from what is *given* in (and to) experience, even if what science calls "values" are amended, as it were, "after the fact"? The German philosopher Edmund Husserl, founder of the phenomenological method, warned in his *Crisis of the European Sciences*, that science was becoming alienated from its roots in the world of "lived experience," the *Lebenswelt* as he called it in German—and hence science increasingly leaves us with a world that makes sense only abstractly, when conceptually filtered, and not as we encounter it our everyday experience.[14] Perhaps, then, it is above all this contemplatively experienced reality of the world to which we must constantly make the effort to refer scientific concepts and findings, if they are really to inform out everyday thoughts and actions.

Fifth, it must be added that this knowledge of God through creation is by no means reductionistic, as the sciences themselves are required to be by their very conception and proper operation, which mandates that they analyze and reduce the rich complexity of creation that offers itself to our living experience, into its simplest components: subatomic particles and ultimately bits of information. Nor does the sacramental, mystical, contemplative consciousness of traditional Christianity reduce the sparkling particularity of created things to an undifferentiated, pantheistic puree, i.e. into some all-enveloping cosmic soup. Rather, it allows each created thing to display its own unique mode of manifesting the divine goodness. These modes have been from ancient times called the *logoi*, the unique essence of each particular thing, each of them reflecting diversely and unrepeatably the Eternal Logos of which they are, each in their own way, images. The Son of God, "through Whom are things were made," as Lossky puts it, this same Eternal "Logos is the divine hearth whence fly the creative rays, the '*logoi'* peculiar to creatures, these causative words of God which at once raise up and name all beings."[15] Yet Western theory of knowledge has maintained that what can be truly known is not particulars, but universals alone—not this tree, for example, but the botanical laws of trees in general. The understanding that individuals do, in fact, have an intelligible, irreducible core that makes them unique—prior to all generalization—and that there is a

[14] Cf Edmund Husserl, *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, translated by David Carr, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

[15] Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989, p.56.

way this can be known, is characteristic of Byzantine thought from Evagrius to Maximus to the present. In the West, however, it is represented mostly among certain poets (most notably, Gerard Manley Hopkins), who in their own ways have tried also to understand the wonderful detail, the exquisite particularity of the dappled creation God has granted us.

Sixth, by distinguishing between the inherently mysterious essence of God and the all-encompassing "energies" or "activities" of God, Eastern Christianity has insisted that we must emphatically affirm *both* divine transcendence and divine immanence in creation—affirm both the deep, transcendent mystery of the divine *essence*, and at the same time embrace the divine energies as infiltrating and infusing and animating all creation, whose beauty should thus be appreciated and celebrated as a revelation of the eternal Word of God through Whom it was created. The Eastern distinction between essence (*ousia*) and activity or energy (*energeia*), never well understood in the West, allows fidelity both to the scriptural injunction against idolatry, along with the insistence that no man has seen the invisible God, while at the same time embracing the equally persistent affirmation that God is everywhere—closer to us than we are to ourselves—and that the Spirit of God "fillest all things." We can know God through His activity in the world—the divine energies that are always at work everywhere, if we have eyes to see—while preserving the radical transcendence of the divine essence, God as He knows Himself, forever mysterious even to the angelic orders. Lacking this distinction of essence and energies, the West's complementary dangers, its Scylla and Charybdis, have always been *pantheism* on the one hand and abstract *transcendence* on the other: either God as totally present in the world, in His very essence—as a pie is present in each of its pieces—or completely absent, *deus absoconditus* and ultimately *deus otiosus*, God distant and removed from the world, and ultimately superfluous to it. Orthodox thought and spirituality, in contrast, can powerfully affirm that God is present, and can be always experienced, everywhere in creation through His energies or activities, while at the same time insisting upon the mysterious integrity of the divine essence.

Finally, **seventh**, there is a triadic relation—largely forgotten by modernity—between humanity, God, and nature that the sciences cannot acknowledge, that environmental literature reflects with no more than a fragmented vision, but that can be grasped insightfully from within Orthodox theology. This triadic relationship is elusive for the modern mindset, yet it may be the most important element of the traditional Christian understanding of creation for us to retrieve and understand. As noted already, creation is above all *taxis* or order: the providential order of the created world. And many of the founders of modern science, often pious believers like Isaac Newton, believed that unlike all previous generations, they had finally discovered exactly what that order consisted in. The true order of creation, they believed, was the mathematical order of the science of mechanics. A powerful new idea. And in an age of incipient democracy, a seductively egalitarian idea as well, promising access to what seemed to be nothing less than the divine intellect, now accessible to anyone who bothered to learn the mathematical language spoken by the Creator. But do the abstractions of mathematics and mechanics really correspond to the

same order of creation celebrated by the psalmist, the order that enraptures Job, the order that the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament seek to articulate with careful and circumspect and often elliptical language?

The mathematical order of nature, understood not according to the contemplative orientation of ancient cosmology, but as it is pursued today by the natural sciences, bears only a shadowy resemblance to the order of creation experienced by ancient Christianity, which was first of all an aesthetic order, an order of beauty, everywhere proclaiming the glory of God to all who had eyes to see. And it was an order of goodness, where God's love for creation was manifest in its smallest details. Moreover, it was an order of ultimate truth, revealing everywhere the invisible reality that is visibly expressed in creation. Above all, it was felt to be an order of love, an order that is itself a gift of love, a gift whereby God offers something of Himself—a loving gift that culminates, but by no means begins, with the Incarnation. And it is thus an order that can be glimpsed only in the most fleeting ways by the disinterested, calculative rationality of the natural sciences. Rather, to understand this deeper order of creation—to see it and experience it—requires a corresponding order within the soul of the knower. Prior to the contemplation of nature, *theōria physikē*, the ancient ascetic tradition has always prescribed the purification of the heart, a restoration of inner peace and order. Hence the truest knowledge of creation has not two poles, knower and known, but three: the soul's understanding of creation—i.e. its ability to see it for what it truly is—is dependent on its relation to God. Only to the degree that the soul is itself ordered can it see and celebrate the genuine order of creation as love, as goodness, as truth, and as love.

Is it not possible, then, that the Western view of nature as a self-contained mechanism, self-subsistent and operating on its own—without need of anything beyond it either for its being or its functioning—and the corresponding view that knowing nature therefore requires nothing more than the indifferent, "objective" attitude that we would bring to understanding a purely artificial, mechanistic system—that these assumptions are not only questionable, but that they constitute the metaphysics (or theory of reality) and epistemology (or theory of knowledge) that underlie the environmental crisis we currently face? And what if the very substance of creation was infused with love, if the natural world was essentially, before all else, not just one divine gift among others, but the initial and ongoing gift that God has offered humanity, which like all true gifts would consist in the offering not of the given but of the giver, in this case God himself? And what if the only way to receive—to "take in" or understand this gift—were in a loving, thankful, appreciative, contemplative response? Indifference here would be not just incomprehension but ingratitude.

The implications of this premise are far-reaching. However helpful the objective, scientific analyses may be—and I do not for a moment wish to suggest that we can dispense with them—they cannot *by themselves* lead to a healing of the earth without a healing of the soul—cannot restore the good and true and beautiful order of creation, before our own hearts are restored to their original created order.

Who will believe that there is a deeper, truer grasp of nature than objective scientific and technological knowledge— believe that an ancient poet writing god-intoxicated psalms, or a meagerly educated hermit living an obscure life in some

cave on Mt. Athos, might understand nature better than a Nobel laureate at Stanford or MIT? Perhaps only someone who has, in his or her heart—and indeed, perhaps in response to the goodness and beauty glimpsed in the created order—already begun the process of purifying the soul, of restoring it to the original order of creation—of making the soul not just the *image* (as it must be, according to ancient Christianity) but also the *likeness* of God, bearing an increasing resemblance to the divine being, so that the glory of the creator may thereby be progressively discerned everywhere in creation. That this kind of understanding is the thing most missing from our approach to the problems that we call "environmental"—and that anything short of this will distort not just the possible solution but the very problem itself, that we must first of all come to spiritually *see* nature as creation—these will not be easily grasped by people outside the realm of the ancient faith that Orthodox Christians believe has been most fully preserved within its own traditions. Except, perhaps, for the poets, and those whose souls are poetic…. And for those seeking an ancient wisdom concerning creation, which they instinctively sense must somehow have been preserved, even if possessing only a vague and indefinite sense of where this might be discovered. Without denying that certain elements of this traditional wisdom may be found in other locales as well, Orthodox Christianity, especially as it is practiced by those monks and nuns who serve as its "spiritual athletes," has preserved and embodied this much needed, and deeply therapeutic, orientation toward creation as it "groans and travails" for its own deliverance, perhaps more now than ever before.

Chapter Nine The Truth of Nature: Environmental Theology and the Epistemology of Asceticism

I

A few weeks ago, I was startled when an enormous limb from a great, sheltering oak came crashing down in our yard, shaking the earth around it and completely blocking the small road in front of our house. With the help of kind neighbors and several power saws, we soon had the road cleared, with lots of firewood for the winter. But I was heartsick. The tree that had crowned our yard for the three decades we have lived there—that had, even before our house itself, welcomed me home every day—was now a danger to others and had to come down. I feel like I have lost a dear friend.

Trees are far more than just one more manner of growing thing among others: more than just the objects of botany and the life sciences, they have long been vehicles of revelation, of divine truth. We recall the Garden of Paradise—first described as a place of trees, and then said to also contain certain very special trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We recollect the Oak of Mamre, under which Abraham offered hospitality to the three angels, even as the Holy Trinity was prefigured and proclaimed for those with ears to hear. We recall the olive tree that bore a leaf heralding to Noah the return of God's blessing upon the earth. We might also think of the juniper tree under which Elijah reposed in despair, only to be wakened by the comfort of God's angel. We remember, perhaps, how trees have allowed for holy hearing and seeing: the fig tree in whose shade Nathaniel first heard about Christ—who saw him beforehand underneath that same tree—as well as the sycamore tree that elevated Zacchaeus to see Christ: to see and be seen by He who sees all. And we recall above all the tree of the True Cross—a most wonderful tree in which cedar, pine, and cypress had grown together, according to the prophecy of Isaiah; a tree that had been watered by Lot, the nephew of Abraham; and which had once formed the foundation of the Temple in Jerusalem. It

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_9

was, and remains, the Tree of Our Salvation. Thus, as we cross ourselves throughout the course of the day, we venerate a Holy Tree!

So we have done a fine thing, I think, in planting a tree here today. And surely we could have a rewarding time together for the next hour or so, thinking about practical things likes planting trees and caring for all the good things of creation that rise up from the earth to express the goodness and beauty of God. But alas, you have chosen a philosopher to speak today, and philosophers notoriously pursue a long path to get to what seems close already, perhaps because they seek the foundations of things, and perhaps sometimes because they sense that things are not quite as close as they seem—that it may take an effort to draw near to what is already close to us. But as I proceed philosophically, don't loose hope that I will be trying to get closer to the trees, even amidst what may seem like hopeless errancy in the forest.

II

As with any properly philosophical talk, I want to begin with a perplexity hidden in something that seems rather straightforward. It comes from a statement by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, where His All Holiness states: "The crisis that we face is—as we all know and as we all readily admit—not primarily ecological but religious; it has less to do with the environment and more to do with spiritual consciousness."[1] Now at first glance, this simply means that if we want to solve the ecological crisis, we will need to grow in our "spiritual consciousness." And who among us today would disagree? But the Patriarch is saying something more here. He says that the crisis *itself* is "not primarily ecological," but rather "religious," even more a crisis in spiritual consciousness than in the environment itself. But the objection arises: isn't there a very "real" ecological crisis at hand, a crisis defined by the environmental sciences? Yes, this is true. Yet what His All Holiness is saying here is that it is even *more* true to say we have a crisis in "spiritual consciousness," and that this truth is *primary*. How can both be true? And how can one be *more true* than the other?

Hence the perplexity, and hence the seeming strangeness of my title: "The Truth of Nature." For isn't "truth" something that concerns statements or propositions, not things themselves? Words and language, but not trees. The statements that the earth is 4.54 billion years old, or that the capital of New York is Albany, may (or may not) be true, but what would it mean to say the earth (or New York) is itself true? Yet sometimes we *do* say that things themselves are true. We say someone is a true friend, for example, or that a certain metal is true gold, or that *The Brothers Karamazov* is Dostoevsky's true masterpiece. So in this sense, wouldn't true nature simply be the nature that we learn about from the natural sciences, which teach us (for example) that although the floor seems solid, and the sun seems to rise in the east, in fact the floor is mostly empty space interspersed with molecular energies,

[1] Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Foreword, in Margaret Barker, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), ix.

and that it is the earth, and not the sun, that is truly moving? True nature would be nature as science understands it, as opposed to, say, the nature of art or myth or even personal experience. The truth of nature, then, would seem to be that it is a self-contained, self-operational system as the sciences understand it to be, and that is best understood not through anything perceptible, or really any kind of experience at all, but by the language of mathematics. As we all know, this belief that science teaches us the truth of nature first arose in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it is above all this outlook that defines modernity. Moreover, it is a belief of the sort that philosophers call metaphysical, for it concerns what is really real. For modernity, as the philosopher Martin Heidegger puts it, science is "the theory of the real." But surprisingly, he goes on to maintain that the habits of objective representation that characterize science actually prevent us from seeing the trees before us, substituting instead a grid of scientific concepts that objectify the tree along with everything else we encounter, i.e. that the tree of botany, and ironically even the tree of ecology, prevent us from encountering the tree itself. He even suggests that it is the poets—people like Hölderlin in Germany, or we might add Blake in England, and Thoreau and Muir in America—who can help us come closer to the tree as it stands before us, approach it more truly.

To understand this surprising claim, we ask: what makes us so certain that "real" nature is the nature of the scientist, and not the nature of the poet, or the nature of ancient myth—the nature of the Psalmist, perhaps, who sees creation as everywhere proclaiming and celebrating the glory of God? Well, the answer seems easy and obvious. If we want to build a hydroelectric dam, or synthesize some new material, or utilize a laser for surgical operations, we look to science, and not to the writings of poets or contemplatives. We believe that it is science that teaches us the truth of nature, shows us nature as it really is, above all because science *works*. That is, if the truth of nature is science, the truth of science itself is modern technology—the ability to control and manipulate nature to satisfy human needs and desires. And what is the truth of nature for technology? Heidegger's answer here, I believe, is persuasive. For technology, nature is a stock or inventory, raw material or resource, an endless field of infinite malleability. And it is this view, I propose, that characterizes the post-modern view of nature: nature (both environmental nature, as well as human nature) is malleable and manipulable—whatever we want to make of it. Both human nature and environmental nature are plastic in the original sense: they are elastic and moldable. And this, to continue just a bit further with Heidegger, is what science has been striving after all along: rather than being somehow neutral or even contemplative, as many early scientists believed, science is at its core oriented toward the mastery and control that finds its fulfillment in modern technology, for which the truth of nature (both human and environmental) consists in its malleability for human planning. And here we have arrived at something surprising. For we have become so accustomed to this technological truth of nature that we are blinded to just how odd this experience of nature really is, at least in comparison to what I think is the common experience of humanity.

For isn't "nature" precisely the realm of things that *have* a nature and act *according to* that nature? If we compare a busy highway to a great river, we will find that

both demonstrate movement that flows in certain regular patterns. But the movement on the highway is conventional, conforming to little white and yellow lines that are painted onto the highway surface according to purely human rules and conventions. Whereas the movement of the water in the river is obedient not to artificial conventions, but to the inner nature of moving water itself. Likewise, if human beings tend to draw together in various associations, it has always been understood that this is because of a certain sociability in human nature. "Natural" things, as Aristotle put it, act not according to *nomos* or convention, but according to *physis*, according to their own natures. Yet if, as our post-modern, technological understanding sees it, nature is infinitely malleable, then nature *has no nature*. Human beings are whatever they want to be. And the natural environment is whatever we wish to make of it.

In addition, these are not, I would like to emphasize, two different beliefs, but two aspects of a single belief: that the truth of nature is that it has no nature. It would follow, then, that our rejection of the traditional belief in human nature—a rejection which became commonplace in intellectual circles during the last century—and our belief that the order of nature in which we are embedded is whatever we want it to be, a resource for our use, even itself a social construct—these two are profoundly, and I believe insidiously intertwined. Dostoevsky had a name for the regime of thought following from this belief. He called it the regime of the Man-God, humanity set up as creator both of external nature and of its own nature. And Nietzsche's counterpart for this post-modern program, which unlike Dostoevsky he saw not as problematic, but as salutary and indeed even the truth of human nature itself—Nietzsche called this the regime of the *Übermensch*, the overman, the human being who has gone beyond being merely human, having himself become a god, a self-creator. And looking back to the century that has elapsed since these two giants of nineteenth century thought, is it not safe to say that the regime of the God-man, of the *Übermensch*, has been catastrophic, devastating both environmental nature as well as our own human nature?

But before drawing such a bold conclusion, it is perhaps wise to see how Western humanity (and increasingly global humanity) has arrived at this particular truth of nature. And we can begin by asking once again how there can *be* more than one truth of nature.

III

As Fr. Pavel Florensky—philosopher and theologian, scientist and linguist—explains it, the Russian word for truth (*istina*) is related to the verb *est* or "to be." It is analogous to the Greek term, *ontōs on*: what absolutely is in being, or simply "what is." But as both Florensky and Heidegger emphasize, the principal word for truth in Greek, *alētheia*, means originally what is unhidden, what is un-concealed, what is revealed or disclosed. Indeed, this is demonstrated impressively in our Orthodox Paschal greeting. To the declaration (in Greek) that Christ is Risen

(*Christos Anesti*) we say *Alethōs Anesti: Truly* He is Risen. Thus, as in the Russian sense of truth (*istina*), we affirm in our response that Christ *really is* risen. But as in the Greek sense, we also affirm that this has been revealed or unhidden—the stone before the tomb has been rolled away (both literally and figuratively), and the reality of this Resurrection is now disclosed *to us*. Thus, we may say that truth is how things really are, while acknowledging that it is also the degree to which this reality has been made manifest, has been brought out into the open and revealed. That is, there can be different modes of truth, different modes of revealing, without denying that there is some ultimate mode, of truth or *istina* in the Russian sense. We have seen, then, that science and technology are two ways of revealing nature. Are there others? And what, if any, is the most faithful mode of disclosing nature, or if you will, the *truest* mode of revealing?

For if truth is always in some sense an un-concealing, it must mean that there is somehow a certain retrograde tendency toward hiddenness, toward concealment. The philosopher Husserl called one manifestation of this tendency of truth to become concealed "sedimentation," by which he meant that words and concepts over time tend to loose the freshness and fullness of their original meanings as they are "sedimented" through our usage of them. Or at a more general level, as the French philosopher Derrida (drawing on Heidegger) was to later emphasize, every revealing is at the same time a concealing. So what is prior to the truth of nature revealed by science and ultimately by technology? What has been concealed or covered over by the later truth of nature—a question we may pose without at all casting into doubt that that nature *can* be legitimately revealed as an object of science, or as a stock of malleable material for modern technology? These are surely, undeniably truths of a certain manner. But are they ultimate truths—*the* truth of nature, i.e. its deepest, most faithful disclosure?

Like archeologists, carefully deconstructing the strata of accumulated sediment, we can find that underlying the view that the truth of nature is objectivity—nature as an aggregate of objects standing fully comprehended before our gaze—there lies the early modern notion, shared by many founders of modern science such as Newton, that the truth of nature is nature as it is known by God. God is, of course, still the creator—at least in some distant past. But he was able to be the Creator only because of His perfect knowledge, his proto-scientific knowledge of nature. And it is because nature is made according to the pattern of divine knowledge, that it is intelligible to us. Put differently, to know nature truly, to grasp its truth, is to know it *as God knows it*.

I hope you can see just how remarkable this claim really is. The true tree is the tree as it is known by God, who knows it in a very specific way: according to the "single vision" (Blake) of the mathematical schema He uses in creating it. His knowledge of the tree, and the universe as whole, is like that of an engineer who uses the principles of mathematics to design His project, which He then goes on to construct. And it is now, and only now, possible for us to assume the mantle of this divine knowledge, to finally know the tree as it is known by God, by grasping it scientifically, implying that no one really knew trees prior to the last few centuries

in the West. And of course, this also entails the belief that God revealed Himself through His creation in a way that could not really be understood until the seventeenth century, with the rise of mathematical science. Even more remarkable is the fact that this strange, and really quite presumptuous view, is today accepted as common sense, despite its Promethean positioning of humanity as a race of Man-Gods, in a position to take over from the Creator His knowing governance of creation. And here we must ask: apart from its being profoundly questionable theologically, is this really a view that could possibly promote our caring for creation, rather than our mastery and consumption of it, assuming that it is taken as the ultimate mode of truth, God's own truth?

But there are deeper, earlier strata to be found! For before the truth of nature was seen as an object of divine knowledge, it was seen in the Western Middle Ages as embodying those qualities called "transcendentals": characters of being qua being. That is, as the Scholastics held, "to be" is at the same time to be *one*, to be *beautiful*, to be *good*, to be *true*. To the extent that a thing is, then it is good and beautiful. And this beauty and goodness and unity are themselves metaphysical clues to the Creator, who Himself *is* pure beauty, pure goodness. Thus, even in the Latin Christian worldview that had rejected a more direct experience of God through His divine energies, nature still offers us an analogy for comprehending in a certain, limited way God Himself, through the very goodness and beauty that we find in nature. The truth of nature, then, is that it expresses these divine characteristics, everywhere giving evidence of their Creator, testifying to the goodness, beauty, truth, and unity of God. And it was the rejection of this analogy of being or *analogia entis* by medieval nominalism that paved the way for modernity and modern natural science—a tectonic shift, moving us away from seeing nature as an expression of the divine being, a truth to be approached in quiet and humble contemplation—toward seeing it as the object of a certain kind of purely conceptual knowledge, a proud and masterful knowledge that requires no particular piety at all, and certainly nothing like ascetic struggle. It is, rather, an exercise of "natural" reason, as if nature and what transcends it can be successfully separated, even in thought.

IV

But there are deeper strata yet, layers to be found in scripture and patristic texts, that are faithfully preserved in Orthodox thought and spirituality, and that harbor what is beginning to be understood as a vitally important gift of the Orthodox tradition to modern environmental thinking. For allegory and analogy are essentially indirect modes of knowledge, leading us to their correlates only discursively, only through a kind of inference. Whereas in Holy Scripture, we find something much more radical, something much more wonderful. For everywhere (from Genesis I, through the Psalms and other Wisdom Books, to the parables of Christ) scripture teaches us that God *makes Himself manifest*, reveals Himself, in creation. This is stated quite succinctly in Psalm 18:

> The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaimeth the work of his hands.
> Day unto day poureth forth speech, and night unto night proclaimeth knowledge.
> There are no tongues nor words in which their voices are not heard.
> Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the earth.
> In the sun hath He set His tabernacle; and He, like a bridegroom coming forth from his chamber, will rejoice like a giant to run his course.
> From the outermost border of heaven is His going forth, and His goal is unto the outermost part of heaven, and there shall no man hide himself from His heat.

Not just the individual stars in the sky, but the very firmament or vault that holds them in place, the very structure of the cosmos—all speak boldly and clearly in a declaration or proclamation, pouring forth speech and proclaiming knowledge that can be heard and understood by everyone, everywhere on the earth, no matter what tongue is spoken locally, and without need for mathematics or any specially knowledge at all, but rather requiring only a pure heart to be apprehended. God inhabits the very movement of the sun itself as his tent, coming forth like a bridegroom from his wedding chamber at dawn. Indeed, we can experience the glory of His appearing in the warming glow of the sunlight, and then later in the darkening of the evening, which as Psalm 103 reminds us, God has also appointed as the time when all the beasts of the forest come forth to gather their food from God—the time when it is said that the dove appeared to Noah with the olive leaf. But the night ultimately gives way to the emergence of the divine bridegroom in His glory.

As it is proclaimed in the Matins of Holy Saturday, which cites this earlier psalm: "After the night the sun shines out again in brightness; and after death do Thou, O Word, arise once more and shine in Thy glory, as a bridegroom coming from his chamber."[2] In every sunrise, every morning, the resurrection of Christ our true God is proclaimed as its deepest truth! "Words pour forth," glosses St Nikolai Velomirovich, "and through words, the Love of Heaven."[3] Copernicus and his heliocentric cosmology are good and even essential if you wish to launch a satellite, but the Psalms present the more primary and more important truth of the earth and its sun, and indeed the deepest truth of nature! And most wonderfully, it is visible for all who have eyes to see and ears to hear, everywhere and in all times. It is an open secret, a patent truth requiring of us no study of astronomy or cosmology, no mastery of calculus—a truth that has gone forth unto all the earth, audible to every tongue long before Pentecost.

But if God is so powerfully manifest throughout creation, how has "the fool," as Psalm 13 reminds us, "said in his heart: There is no God"? The next verse immediately explains that they (the fools, and this means us, for the most part, and most of the time) "are become corrupt and loathsome in their ways; there is none that doeth good, no not one." Thus, despite the fact that God is manifest in the very course of the sun overhead, and in its arising every morning, we fools nevertheless say in our hearts (if not in our words) that there is no God, because we have become corrupt, unable to see the truth of nature that is revealed before us as a kind of proclamation—a

[2] Cited in J. Manley, *Grace for Grace: The Psalter and the Holy Fathers*, p. 63.
[3] Ibid., p. 64.

claim that we may better understand if we visualize heralds and trumpets and colorful banners that no one could miss, unless they were deaf and blind. But the corruption of our own nature has indeed made us deaf to the proclamation; we can no longer hear, nor can we really see what is right overheard. The "Wisdom of Solomon" [13: 1–5] tells us the same thing: "Surely foolish are all men by nature, who are ignorant of God… For by the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionately the maker of them is seen *[theōreitai]*." And St Paul reminds us yet again, in Romans I, of this same truth of nature, and the folly whereby we fail to grasp it: "For since the creation of the universe, his invisible things are clearly seen. They are perceived through created things, even his eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse" But instead of remaining faithful to the revealing of God through nature, "they became vain in their reasonings, and their uncomprehending heart was darkened. Thinking themselves to be wise, they became fools." And the epistle continues, maintaining that because the foolish ones had abandoned what it names "the truth of God," God "gave them up" to what it calls vile and unnatural passions. And lest we would exempt ourselves by singling out some particular demographic alone, St Gregory of Sinai points out that for all of us, it is the case that our "state is an unnatural one." Speaking for us all, he says that "I, owing to my innumerable sins, am in a state contrary to nature."[4] And this, in turn, explains our blindness to the truth of nature. For as St Nikitas Stēthatos explains, "The soul's apprehension of the *nature of things* changes in accordance with its own inner state."[5] If we are in an unnatural state, it would follow that we would indeed fail to apprehend the nature of things truly, fail even to see that nature itself *had* a nature. And if we fail to understand this deepest truth of nature, then how could we possibly act in accord with it? The Ecumenical Patriarch, then, would be entirely correct. The "ecological crisis" would indeed be primarily a "religious" crisis. Yet why now? Why do we fail to apprehend God in nature more than ever, since the unnatural state we have been discussing is bound up with the Fall itself, and not with anything recent? Could it be that the truth of nature as it is commonly apprehended in a postmodern world—our sense of environmental nature and human nature alike as infinitely malleable—is deeply incompatible with the truth of nature as God created it, and thus inimical to the very nature of nature?

V

Having already turned to patristic texts to help us understand scripture, I think that patristic wisdom can also clarify several other issues that we have skipped over rather lightly. First, does it not compromise divine transcendence to say that God is so manifestly present in nature: is this not a kind of pantheism, compromising divine transcendence? And here, the patristic distinction between the divine *ousia* (essence

[4] *Philokalia* IV, p. 238.

[5] *Philokalia* IV, p. 93. Italics added.

or substance) and the divine *energeiai* (energies or activities) is of the greatest importance for understanding the truth of nature. The divine energies are present everywhere around us in creation, even though we are usually unaware of them, while the divine essence is forever shrouded in mystery, even from the highest angelic orders. To paraphrase the poet Hölderlin, God is indeed "manifest like the sky," even as He essentially transcends anything we could ever know or encounter.

Second, is it not absurdly, intolerably anthropomorphic to say that nature speaks—that it proclaims or declares anything? Yet we need only remember that Christ, through whom all things are created, is Himself the Eternal Logos or Word to realize that for God to be present in nature is for creation to "say" something. St Maximus formulates this in his theology of divine *logoi*, whereby everything—every leaf and pebble, every sparrow and lily of the field—is the articulation of a unique inner principle, a *logos*, that itself mirrors Christ the Eternal Logos. Every creature has something to say, and because these are *logoi*, and not divine exemplars as in Western theology (rendering them universals, rather than being each one unique and particular as in the Orthodox East) they can come together to "say" something greater—to say many things, to say everything and more—in a kind of cosmic syntax, just as the words of a line of poetry come together to form a verse, as stanza, a poem, and eventually a corpus of work.

Finally, why do we not see these divine energies, and hear these divine *logoi*, more often—even though in some sense we do experience them every time we have a fresh encounter with creation? The patristic answer is the same as that in scripture: we experience God in nature dimly, if at all, because our own natures are corrupted. But of course, this is not the last word, for the patristic tradition has given us a rich and powerful body of ascetic wisdom: advice on how to purify our *nous* or conscious apprehension, and this purification or *katharsis* will in turn lead to *theōria* or the "contemplative seeing" of God in all things—and specifically lead to *theōria physikē* or the noetic contemplation of nature. We know this from the Desert Fathers and ascetics throughout history, and this current endures robustly to this day as we repeatedly find great ascetics in our holy monasteries proclaiming most eloquently the glory of God in creation. "Listen to the rough crags," urges Elder Joseph the Hesychast, "those mystical and silent theologians, which expound deep thoughts and guide the heart and *nous* toward the Creator.… The beautiful rocks theologize like voiceless theologians, as does all of nature—each creature with its own voice or its silence."[6] Or let us hear the words of St Porphyrius: "All things around us are droplets of the love of God—both things animate and inanimate, the plants and the animals, the birds and the mountains, the sea and the sunset and the starry sky. They are little loves through which we attain to the great Love that is Christ."

But we also find something parallel going on in more secular literature as well. Consider the later novels of Dostoevsky, where one after another we encounter figures such as the Underground Man, or Raskolnikov, or Ivan Karamazov who experience nature as oppressive or bleak or indifferent due to the corruption of their own

[6]Elder Joseph the Hesychast, *Monastic Wisdom: The Letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast* (Florence, AZ: St Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, 1998) p.1.

natures, even as figures such as Elder Zosima awaken most impressively to the glory of God in nature as their hearts become purified and warmed. And we can discover this in our greatest nature writers as well: in Thoreau and Muir, in Annie Dillard and Wendell Berry. Repeatedly, we find in them an ascetic cleansing that leads to a disclosing of the truth of nature as manifesting its Creator: not as a cipher or trace, but boldly, patently, declaratively, to use the language of the Psalms. To really see the tree in its ultimate truth, we must purify our own natures, and free ourselves from the unnatural state in which we are mired. "Let us purify our *nous*," says St Anthony, "for I believe that when the *nous* {or higher "intellect"] is completely pure and *in its natural state*, it gains penetrating insight."[7] Then we shall see the tree of Adam and Abraham and Lot and Noah and Isaiah and Elijah and Nathaniel and Zacchaeus and Christ Himself—the Tree or our Salvation!

VI

But of course, the environmental crisis is not simply a problems for us as individuals, but as a society and ultimately as a global community which is racing headlong into a dizzying acceleration of technological innovation—which as we have maintained here means an increasing perception of the truth of nature as its being a resource, with no inner *logos* or integrity. And here we run up against larger societal and cultural problems that I think we need to confront. Heidegger, among others, has argued that modern technology represents an assault upon human nature, as well as upon nature in general. We see this clearly, of course, in the dangers of bioengineering and attempts to recreate our biological nature according to our own wishes—attempts to make the eighth day of creation a celebration of our own Promethean usurpation of the Creator's initiative—attempts to fulfill Dostoevsky's warnings about the regime of the Man-God. We find it in the mediation of our relation to creation and one another through the screens of computers, tablets, and smart-phones. We find it in our newfound sense of entitlement to a life that is largely free of pain and illness—a gift of modern medicine that I would not wish to forego, but through which our own mortality is increasingly seen as a result of medical failure, rather than as a defining feature of our fallen nature. We encounter it in the possibility of being so endlessly entertained and distracted by technological media that we need never endure the kind of solitude that would require us to confront the meaning of our lives. We find this assault on nature simply in the dizzying pace of technological change, and even worse in the sense that we must always be ready to abandon "old" and traditional values and practices in order to be "progressive" and not to be left behind.

Perhaps worst of all, this sense of being a passenger on a vehicle that is speeding out of control—and its corollary that we need to shut up, hang on, and acquiesce—has given us a moral blindness to things the Orthodox Church has perennially called

---

[7] Cited in St Hesychios, *Philokalia*, p. 194; italics added.

"sin"—that is, to specific corruptions of our own natures. Nor is it accidental that the locus of this corruption has to do with our own fertility, i.e. with our most intimate bond to the order of creation—to our own natural identity with the natural order as mammals—and the manner in which the Church has sought to sanctify this nature. And here I want to pose some questions that will be unsettling to contemporary mindsets. How is it that we expect to "save" the natural environment when we have become so profoundly alienated from our own natures? When we subject our own natural fertility to the desire for endless consumerism through the selfish and indiscriminate use of artificial contraception. Or when we regard our own sexuality as a "preference," to be constructed as we see fit, as suits individual desire and fancy? Or when the very contours of our sexuality are increasingly shaped by the grotesque distortions and degradations of pornography? How could we possibly expect to protect life on this planet while we destroy the lives of our own children in staggering numbers: roughly 60 million since Roe v. Wade—not only doing unspeakable violence to the unborn, but violating our own nature as mothers and fathers as well? How, then, can we speak of "biophilia" as a principle of environmental preservation, as E. O. Wilson has done, without connecting it to our lack of effective empathy (and contempt for our natural kinship) to our own brothers and sisters in need, as we exhaust our income on technological toys instead? That is, how can we even *see* the truth of nature when we are so profoundly blinded to the violations of our own natures by the dazzle and blur of modern technology and its disclosure of nature as a field of infinite malleability? And if we cannot even see the truth of nature, how on earth can we honor it and sustain it, let alone celebrate it, in any but the most superficial sense?

Science itself, which few of us would wish to discard, has perhaps taught us something misleading, not as part of scientific practice but as an abuse of it. It has taught us that there are no moral prerequisites, no prerequisite of life or character, required for the knowledge of nature. And perhaps this may in fact be true for the revealing of nature in its purely objective character. But if the argument of my talk is sound, then this is not the highest or best or most important truth of nature. The ultimate truth of nature lies in its relation to God— the loss of whose "face" or "countenance" creation cannot endure, as the Psalms teach us—and we cannot understand this as long as our own relation to God is corrupted. And I think this is corroborated to some degree by the fact that the environmental movement itself was not originally founded by scientists at all, but by writers and "naturalists" and poets and artists and strange hermits who were deeply ascetic—men and women who parallel to the Desert Fathers gave up the comforts of the city and, in the words of Thomas Traherne, came out into the country. Too often, I fear, the "environment" is a huge abstraction, and perhaps even an idol, for its strident advocates, who are all too often people with very little living, meaningful connection to nature.

But surely the beautiful Akathist that Metropolitan Tryphon has written expresses far better than a philosopher's words this connection between prayerfully seeking God's help in healing and restoring our own natures and properly celebrating the nature that surrounds and encompasses and nurtures us—even while serving as the

first great icon of the Creator Himself, without whom all our environmental efforts and energies will surely be in vain. To Him be honor and glory unto ages of ages.

Thank you, and may God grant you a most blessed ecclesial year![8]

[8] An earlier version of this chapter was delivered on September 1, 2013, as the keynote address at an environmental conference "Orthodoxy. Ecology. Together.," held at St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, New York. It was preceded by a celebration of the Akathist Hymn, "Glory to God for All Things" in the Chapel, and the planting of a tree on campus.

Part III
Byzantine Essays

The four essays in this section are for the most part exercises in what is customarily called philosophical theology. But an important caveat is in order regarding this rubric, for they are not exercises in the natural theology by means of which a number of contemporary philosophers have attempted to revive the enterprise of Scholasticism in order to show that "reason" alone can provide proper justifications for "faith."[1] On the contrary, it is central to the argument of this book that the distinction and often dichotomy between reason and revelation, nature and supernature, visible and invisible, that has become ingrained in Western philosophy and theology is not just problematic, but pernicious. According to more ancient traditions, not just those deriving from Jerusalem, but those rooted in Athens as well, there is no merely "natural" layer separate from the invisible order that infuses and energizes it. This conviction is central not only to the tradition rooted in the work of Plato and his successors, but also in the tradition of ancient Christian thought that is continued in the Byzantine East, and it is perhaps above all the rejection of this insight that has generated so many of the problems we face today in the conceptual landscape of a West that is increasingly becoming global, leaving us with the inheritance of a purely "secular" and "naturalistic" world that is visited by the "sacred" only as an afterthought, if not added on as a kind of axiological ornament. These essays, then, all of which were first presented in the context of informal symposia, bring to bear a philosophical mode of inquiry upon religious and specifically Christian themes such as prayer and love and forgiveness. They are not the essays of an Orthodox theologian, and they should not be taken as representing the views or the Orthodox Church, but rather the incursions of a philosopher back and forth not only across the boundaries of East and West, but the boundaries of the visible and invisible as well.[2]

---

[1] For a very different, but insightful discussion of the problematic character of the Western medieval "reason-revelation distinction," articulated from within the perspective of Jewish thought, see Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (Cambridge: 2012) Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–12.

[2] All four chapters in this section are based on lecutres first delivered to Faculty Fellows Colloquia sponsored by the Center for Spiritual Life at Eckerd College.

Chapter Ten "As We Also Forgive:" Asceticism and Forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer, According to St. Maximus the Confessor

"And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." (Matthew 6: 12)[1] This verse from the "Lord's Prayer" surely represents the most familiar passage about forgiveness in English, and probably in any Western language. Like all that is familiar, it is reassuring, comfortable to our ears. Too much so, perhaps, for its familiarity conceals from us much that is puzzling and unsettling. Is this not problematic, a most risky request, to invite upon ourselves the same kind or degree of forgiveness from God that we exhibit towards our neighbor? Am I such a fine exemplar of forgiveness that I could possibly want to be forgiven by God under the same criteria, or in the same measure, that I have established through my own practice? Beyond this, do I really know what it means to forgive in the first place, that I should invite God to act according to my own understanding? Isn't the easy smile and the graceful gesture, offered to the one who jostles me in a crowd or cuts me off in traffic, no more than the pocket change of the moral life—like the person at the register who waves me ahead when I come up short a penny or two?

But of course, there may be graver matters, too, where we feel that we have forgiven offences of real consequence. But are *these* the real thing? Vladimir Jankélévitch published in 1967 one of the most thought-provoking books on this concept: *Le Pardon*, only recently translated into English as *Forgiveness*. Not the least of its virtues is to sort out and explore at length what he argues are the many substitutes or similitudes for what he calls "pure forgiveness," "true forgiveness," "forgiveness in the strict sense." We may, for example, make excuses for the other person—"he didn't know what he was doing," or "she really had no other choice"—and thereby substitute a purported *understanding* for genuine *forgiveness*. Or we may simply hold up the grievance to the *decay of time*, like suspending a sugar cube in a cup of hot tea, knowing in the process that it will slowly, but certainly, dissolve. In such a case, to forget is not truly to forgive. Or we may take subtle pride in our moral superiority, as we elevate ourselves above some slight or injury. "It is very

[1] This, and other translations from the New Testament, are taken from *The Orthodox New Testament. Volume I: The Holy Gospels* (Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent, 1999).

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_10

possible," Jankélévitch maintains, "that a forgiveness free from any ulterior motive has never been granted here below, that in fact an infinitesimal amount of rancor subsists in the remission of every offense, such as the calculating self-interest that cannot be weighed, or that a microscopic motive of concern for the self subsists hidden in the underground of unselfishness [such that] forgiveness is an event that has never taken place in history. . ."[2] This difficulty, and perhaps impossibility, is brought home to us most vividly when we hear or read of terrible things perpetrated upon innocent people, and find ourselves unsure of our own ability to forgive in such a circumstance—and it is then above all that we speak softly to ourselves the next lines of the Prayer: "and let us not be brought into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (Matthew 6: 13) Yet somehow, incomprehensibly, the terrible must somehow be overridden, even annihilated: "it is the very miracle of forgiveness,' Jankélévitch maintains, "that in a burst of joy annihilates the having-been and the having-done. By the grace of forgiveness, the thing that had been done has not been done."[3] How, then, is forgiveness—true forgiveness—really possible? And what is it, after all?

Surely high on any list of the most terrible, and least forgivable, things that we have experienced collectively would be the mass murders that took place in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia on September 11, 2001. Yet it was with a kind of relief, a kind of wonder, a sense of spiritual thirst being quenched, that I heard at Vespers just a few days later, in the general litany for those who have died, and after prayers for the souls of those who were murdered, a prayer for the murderers who died that day as well. ".. . As we also forgive our debtors."

The German poet Hölderlin was evoking an ancient principle of medicine—the principle of homeopathy—when he wrote, "where the danger is greatest, there also lies the saving power." So, too, I would like to proceed from the ashes of that terrible day when forgiveness seemed impossible—proceed from what some will see as an improbable coincidence and others as a miracle and a sign—for help in addressing the questions concerning forgiveness that I have posed. From there, I will consider a reflection on this verse from the "Lord's Prayer," written by the seventh century monk and ascetic, St. Maximus the Confessor.

Although it is not widely known, the Twin Trade Towers were not the only Manhattan landmarks destroyed on that terrible day. In the shadow of those majestic towers was a tiny but historic building, one of Lower Manhattan's oldest places of worship, St. Nicholas Orthodox Church. Like the Twin Towers, this temple too was pulverized. Yet surprisingly, not everything was atomized into dust, for amidst the rubble was found a small metal cross, and even more remarkably, two paper icons—remarkable not just because they were made of paper, but also because of just which two icons were preserved.

The cross, of course, is for ancient Christianity a symbol not only of suffering, but of the intersection and union of earth and heaven, of the visible with the invisi-

---

[2] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Forgiveness*, trans. Andrew Kelley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 1.

[3] Ibid. P. 164.

ble, of the horizontal with the vertical. Moreover, it reminds us of Christ’s words from the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” a petition that indeed draws together heaven and earth. (Luke 23: 33)

The first of the paper icons was the *Theotokos* of the Life-giving Spring *(Zōodochos Pēgē)*. Historically, this icon refers to a place near the city walls of Constantinople, where a future emperor, upon the request from a blind man for something to drink, heard a voice telling him where to find a spring, and many miracles came to be associated with these waters. The spring, in turn, came to be associated with the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God or literally “God-bearer,” whose bearing of God within her became a life-giving spring for all humanity—the water which St. Photoni, the Samaritan woman at the well, asked to receive. So this classic Byzantine icon depicts the *Theotokos* rising from the midst of the spring, with Christ dwelling within her heart—the exemplar for all believers to purify their own hearts, so that God can be born within—and with life-giving water pouring forth for the grateful people who surround it, for all of us who are spiritually blind, yet seek the healing, life-giving waters that can flow from a purified heart, in whom Christ dwells. As I hope to show, it is also from such a heart alone that true forgiveness can flow.

Nearby, however, a second paper icon was also discovered in the ashes and dust, the icon of St. Dionysius of Zakynthos. Perhaps more than any other saint, this Dionysius is associated in Orthodox hagiography with forgiveness, for reasons that become clear in the central episode of the saint’s biography.

While St. Dionysius was serving as abbot of a remote monastery, on the same island of Zakynthos upon which he was raised:

> A certain stranger murdered the saint’s brother Constantine, an illustrious nobleman. Fearing his victim’s relatives, the stranger, by chance or by God’s will, sought refuge in the monastery where St. Dionysius was the abbot. When the saint asked the fugitive why he was so frightened, he confessed his sin and revealed the name of the man he had murdered, asking to be protected from the family’s vengeance. St. Dionysius wept for his only brother, *as was natural*. Then he comforted the murderer and hid him, showing him great compassion and love. Soon the saint’s relatives came to the monastery with a group of armed men and told him what had happened. He pretended to know nothing about it. After weeping with them and trying to console them, he sent them off in the wrong direction. Then he told the murderer that he was the brother of the man he had killed. He admonished him as a father, and brought him to repentance. After forgiving him, St. Dionysius brought him down to the shore and helped him to escape to another place in order to save his life.

It is at this point the narrative adds: “Because of the saint’s Christ-like virtue, he was granted the gift of working miracles.”[4]

Christ impaled upon the cross, asking forgiveness for his executioners. And St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, emulating him, praying for his own executioners even as the stones crush the life from his body: “Lord, do not make this sin stand against them.” (Acts 7: 60) Great and mighty acts of forgiveness, acts that may be beyond our comprehension. But there is something particularly poignant and com-

[4] “The Lives of the Saints,” Orthodox Church in America website: www.ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?FSID=103564. Italics added.

pelling in the story of St. Dionysius and the murderer, perhaps because it may actually seem to us more difficult to forgive the murder of someone we love than to forgive those who would take our own life. And forgiveness of such magnificence would clearly meet, and perhaps surpass, the rigors of Jankélévitch's criteria for pure forgiveness. Thus—along with the first icon, the Life-giving Spring of Christ being born in the heart—I would like to also hold up this narrative of forgiveness concerning an icon of St. Dionysius, found also among the ashes, the ashes of destruction and the ashes of rancor—for both of them are images or icons of forgiveness. We will have reason to return to them later.

Although he has exerted a powerful, if often unnoticed influence in the West upon thinkers from Eriugena to von Balthasar and Marion, St. Maximus the Confessor has until recently been appreciated primarily in the Orthodox East, where since the time of his contemporaries he has exerted a formative influence, comparable to that of St. Augustine in the Latin West. But while much of Augustine's thought revolves around epistemological questions of faith and knowledge, Maximus sustains a focus upon the spiritual process of *theōsis* or divinization, a union with God to which he refers not just humanity, but the entire cosmos. Maximos was himself a man who had much to forgive. Following sustained persecution, he earned the title of "Confessor" when, before he was sent into exile on the shores of the Black Sea for his opposition to the Monothelite heresy, his right hand was severed and his tongue plucked out, so that both his writing and his speaking would be silenced. One of his most influential writings, in no small part because of its inclusion in the *Philokalia*, was the short, but extremely dense, commentary *On the Lord's Prayer*.

The modern reader, however, should remember that patristic exegesis of scripture operates on numerous levels, any or all of which may operate simultaneously: historical or literal; typological or allegorical; tropological or moral; and anagogical or mystical. And in the Christian East, it has always been emphasized that even with events that must be understood as unshakably historical, such as the Virgin Birth or Crucifixion or Resurrection of Christ, the mystical or anagogical meaning ("anagogical" refers literally to "ascent") is the most important one—i.e. the meaning an event has for our own spiritual journey of union with God, "the deification (*theōsis*) of our nature."[5] Thus, at the beginning of his commentary on the Lord's Prayer, Maximos prays: "I beseech the Lord, who has taught us this prayer, to open my mind *(nous)* so that it may grasp the mysteries contained in it, and to give me words equal to the task of elucidating what I have understood."[6]

Thus, in the seven lines of this prayer, Maximos finds progressively articulated each of the seven great mysteries of the ancient Christian faith: (1) true theology, or authentic knowledge of who God is; (2) adoption as children of God by grace; (3) the union of heaven and earth; (4) participation in the eternal life of God; (5) the

[5] St. Maximos the Confessor, "On the Lord's Prayer," in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text,* Volume Two, compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), p. 286.

[6] Ibid. I have substituted here the word "mind" for the translators' use of "intellect" to translate the Greek *nous*.

restoration of human nature; (6) the abolition of the law of sin; and (7) the destruction of the tyranny of the evil one. As it is summarized by Maximus:

> [1] First, [the Prayer] speaks of the Father, his name, and his kingdom. [2] Second, it shows us that the person who prays is by grace the son of this Father. [3] It asks that those in heaven and those on earth may be united in one will. [4] It tells us to ask for our daily bread. [5] It lays down that men should be reconciled with one another, and unites us with ourselves when we forgive and are forgiven, for then it is not split asunder by differences of will and purpose. [6] It teaches us to pray against entering into temptation, since this is the law of sin. [7] And it exhorts us to ask for deliverance from the evil one.[7]

Maximos' exegesis, then, explores in depth each of these mysteries as it is made manifest in the Prayer. But if we are to retain our focus on forgiveness, we shall here be able to address only the fourth and the fifth.

"And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors." St Maixmus' exegesis reveals at least two levels of meaning for this fifth verse. He also shows that each of these two levels in the fifth verse is derivative from a corresponding level of meaning in the immediately preceding fourth verse: "Give us today our daily bread." At one level, then, and as we have noted earlier, the person who states this fifth petition "makes himself a pattern *[paradeigma]* of virtue *[aretē]* for God." But of course, this is paradoxical, since God "Himself has no need to learn from us how to be reconciled with sinners and to waive the penalty for a multitude of atrocious crimes." Thus, in asking God to forgive me as I forgive others, the real point would be for me to accept the imperative to forgive others myself, lest I be judged according to the true gravity of my sins, rather than mercifully. Having made this petition, should I then be tempted not to forgive others, I can immediately see that I would thereby call upon myself the judgment that I otherwise deserve for my own indebtedness to God. This would be somewhat analogous to lifting my eyes heavenward and saying, "If what I am about to say is false, may God strike me dead with lightening." At least ostensibly, this would provide me with a powerful incentive to tell the truth, lest the guarantee of my veracity turn against me, and serve instead as the warrant for my destruction.

Thus, I place myself under an explicit burden with this petition. But it is one that I could not have avoided anyway. We may think, for example, of Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant, who is forgiven his debts, yet who is later found threatening another servant unable to pay a much smaller debt owed to him, and he is consequently forced to pay all the debts he had originally owed. Christ follows this parable with an injunction: "Thus shall My Father, the heavenly One, do to you also, unless each one of you from your hearts forgive his brother their trespasses." (Matthew 18. 21–35). This burden of reciprocity, then, is binding even before we explicitly acknowledge it in the Prayer. Nor can this forgiveness be merely routine or grudging, for we now learn in addition that it must come, as Christ Himself states it, *from our hearts.* "Hence," as Maximos concludes, "just as God dispassionately *[apathos]* forgives his creatures, so [the person who wishes to be forgiven by God]

[7] Ibid., p. 289.

must himself remain dispassionate *[apathos]* in the face of what happens to him and forgive those who offend him."[8]

But now, having acknowledged this standard of forgiveness, and overtly pledged ourselves to it, how are we supposed to arrive at this divine dispassion *[apatheia]* that such forgiveness seems to require? And how can the forgiveness be both dispassionate and from the heart? Here, we must turn to the fourth verse and its petition, "give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6: 11). At the interpretive level corresponding to our initial approach to the fifth verse, and which we may designate as a *moral* or *ethical* level, this petition reminds us of two things. First, we are to ask only for what we need, our daily bread and not our daily *crème brulé*: we are "to be satisfied simply with what sustains our present life, not with what will pamper it." "Let us show," continues Maximus, "that we eat for the sake of living, and not be guilty of living for the sake of eating." And second, this fourth verse reminds us to "not become anxious for the morrow," anxious about what we shall eat, or drink, or wear. "We restrict our prayer for this bread to 1 day only, not daring to extend it to a second day because of Him who gave us the prayer."[9]

Taken together, asking only for bread, and asking even for this bread only 1 day at a time, we will wean ourselves from the two passions *(pathē)* of the soul that would prevent us from forgiving our debtors: desire *(epithymia),* and anger *(thymos*), its natural ally.[10] We should, rather, pursue the goal for which we were created, and of which the Prayer has earlier reminded us: to seek God and his Kingdom. The person who has acquired this liberation from passion *(apatheia)* will thus be free to forgive his debtors. As Maximus puts it, "if someone is not in the least concerned with anything in the visible world, and consequently is not overcome by any bodily affliction, then such a person truly dispassionately forgives those who sin against him." Forgiveness, then, would require a life of asceticism: not necessarily a life lived in a monastic setting, but a life that is free from attachments to things, much the kind of life that is prescribed in the Sermon on the Mount, which after all serves as the narrative context for the Prayer that Jesus teaches. If I am attached to things, if my passions are invested in them, then I will be unable to forgive the one who takes them from me. The fourth verse, then, explains how the fifth verse is possible, what we need to do in order to forgive our enemies.

But this moral or ethical level has certain limitations, and it is for this reason that Maximus characterizes it as merely "philosophical." Certainly one could do worse than live in this way, for it is a good and noble mode of life, similar to attitudes we find prescribed in Buddhism, and similar to the kind of non-attachment prescribed in the *Bhagavad Gita*. It would be, in fact, a kind of Christianized Stoicism, drawing essentially upon the central Stoic concept of *apatheia*—dispassion—or to use the transliterated rendering that has now become derogatory, "apathy." We see these limitations more clearly when we remember that it is not just things to which we are

---

[8] Ibid. p. 301.

[9] Ibid, p. 300.

[10] Ibid. p. 291. "For anger, being by nature the ally of desire, stops of its own accord when once it sees that desire has been put to death."

attached, and about whom we feel passionate, but people as well. And we are uncomfortable when we read in the Stoics Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius the admonition that we equate a son or a wife we might lose with a house or a horse that we might lose as well. We may remember that Christ Himself did not respond "stoically" to the death of his friend Lazarus, but rather He wept. And we can return, here, to St. Dionysius, our *eikōn* of forgiveness, and remember that he too wept for his brother, not just once but twice: first covertly with the murderer, and second openly, with his relatives. He sternly admonished the murderer as well, leading him to repent. Yet he clearly forgave him "from the heart," and this heartfelt forgiveness expressed itself in his taking such extraordinary measures to protect him. Jankélévitch, too, considers Stoic forgiveness as yet another *Ersatz* for the real thing, dismissing the Stoic sage as "hardened" and "haughty" and "condescending": "Injuries, for the sage, are more insignificant than scratches; he hardly perceives their existence."[11]

But it is clear from St. Maximus' exegesis, as well as from the life of St. Dionysius, that Christian *apatheia* must be something quite different, and we can see this if we go beyond the moral level to the deeper, mystical level of his commentary, and of the Prayer itself. For *apatheia*, like ethics and like philosophy as a whole, cannot ascend to what is highest, nor can either ethics or philosophy even be considered as ends in themselves. But because here they stand in service to something higher, they become entirely transformed from their Stoic mode. Beginning now with the fourth verse—the petition of today for our daily bread—and looking toward its mystical meaning—the one that Maximus emphasizes is the most important sense—we see that it is Christ Himself who is the Bread of Life: "The Logos enables us to participate in divine life by making *Himself* our food, in a manner understood by Himself and by those who have received from Him a noetic perception of this kind."[12] And "the Bread of Life in His love gives Himself to all who ask, but He does not give to all in the same way."[13] Rather, He gives to each according to his ability to receive, and this "receptive capacity" is above all prescribed by the purity of our hearts, and thus by the degree of our freedom from passions, by our *apatheia*. Those who have put aside the passions of desire and anger, says Maximus, are now able like Elijah to advance "freely toward God, unencumbered by attachment to any created being."[14] "In souls such as this," he continues, "Christ always desires to be born in a mystical way, becoming incarnate in those who attain salvation, and making the soul that gives birth to Him [also] a Virgin Mother." Thus, the icon of the Life-giving Spring, like other great icons of the *Theotokos* such as the *Platytera*, urges the faithful to give birth to Christ within them through the purification of their hearts. *Apatheia*, then, is no more than a means toward this

[11] Jankélévitch, p. 6.

[12] Maximos, p. 288. Italics added.

[13] Ibid., p. 295.

[14] Ibid. 293 f. "Elijah clearly reveals this mystery in a typological manner through his actions (cf. 2 Kings 2:11—14.) For when he was borne aloft he gave Elisha his [shaggy] cloak, that is, the mortification of the flesh which constitutes the chief glory of moral conduct."

Incarnation of Christ within the heart. And the birth of Christ within the purified soul, given to each according to his "receptive capacity," is at the same time the birth of what is most of all opposed to haughtiness and condescension and hardness of the heart, for it is the birth of Divine Love in the soul. But of course, this Love (which makes true forgiveness possible) should not be understood as yet another passion, but rather in its ontological and cosmological dimensions.

By asking for Christ Himself as our daily bread, while struggling to become free of the passions that would vitiate this nourishment, it is now possible for us to forgive our enemies. But what is this forgiveness that would result, and whose very existence Jankélévitch calls into question? We proceed, then, from the mystical exegesis of the fourth verse on to the deeper, mystical level of the fifth verse, the verse concerning the forgiveness of debts.

First of all, we are now able to clarify why the Prayer seems to set up a conditional relation between our forgiving and our being forgiven.: "God wants to purify us of our passions," argues Maximus, "and show us that the measure of grace conferred on those who are forgiven *corresponds to their inward state*."[15] Thus, the phrase "as we forgive our debtors" would apply *both* to the petition for our daily bread (the birth of Christ in our hearts) as well as to the petition that God forgive us our debts (but understood now in this deeper, mystical manner), and in both cases reflect not some kind of *quid pro quo* on the part of God, but rather teach us that to be capable of receiving divine grace, we must meet certain conditions. What, then, is this mystical sense of forgiveness that becomes possible though the indwelling of divine love?

Formally stated, forgiveness in this truest sense is nothing less than the *restoration of human nature*. It serves, through the grace of God, to restore, at least from within the nodal point of our own person, the unity of human nature from the murderous enmity that has set human nature against itself, and to do so through our union with the Incarnate Logos, the New Adam, who has already made possible this restored unity of nature. In the theology and philosophy of Maximus, the Fall consists generally in division, fragmentation, disintegration, and enmity. And the great source of redemption from this division is that original nature from which sin has displaced us: the starting point, the means of transport, and the destination itself are each for us the same principle of love, that which by nature unites, overcoming fragmentation and enmity. And it is love that is the true *corrective* for both desire and anger, not some state of blank indifference:

> Love of God is opposed to desire, for it persuades the intellect *(nous)* to control itself with regard to sensual pleasure. Love for our neighbor is opposed to anger, for it makes us scorn fame and riches. These are the two pieces of silver which our Savior gave to the innkeeper. (cf. Luke 10:35) so that he should take care of you."[16]

---

[15] Ibid., p. 301. Italics added.

[16] St. Maximos the Confessor, "The Four Hundred Centuries on Love," in *The Philokalia,* 4:75, p. 110. I have substituted "pieces of silver" for the translators' anachronistic "pence."

The passions corrupt three modes of unity: the union of God and humanity, the unity of human nature itself, and the inner unity of the individual soul. And because of this, we are further rendered incapable of assuming our role as cosmic unifier, for Maximos understands humanity as having been created to be the peerless mediator, the microcosmic interface bringing unity to the five great divisions of the macrocosm: male and female, paradise and the world we inhabit, heaven and earth, visible and invisible, and God and creation. Instead, through the Fall, we have brought discord to each of these dimensions, rather than unity. But by his eternal uniting of human nature with the divine nature, Christ makes possible a restoration of lost unity in all these dimensions. "He shows," states Maximus, "through what he has accomplished mystically, that the Logos unites what is separated and that alienation from the Logos divides what is united."[17]

Moving on from the fourth petition to the fifth, from the indwelling of the Logos in the heart to a forgiveness whose power is ontological rather than emotional, from unity with God to unity with our neighbor, we restore to human nature the unity of which the Fall deprived it. Maximus expresses a kind of metaphysical horror that through humanity, nature should have turned against itself, giving rise to "an enmity which led nature to wage an implacable war against itself" in the form of human discord. Thus, the deed done must, as Jankélévitch foresees, indeed become undone, leaving no trace even in memory: "He [that truly forgives] must not allow [even] the memory of things that afflict him to be stamped on his intellect *[nous] lest he inwardly sunder human nature by separating himself from some other man, although he is a man himself*."[18] But this degree of rigor does not derive from a consequentialist premise, suggesting that any lingering memory of injury might somehow result in some empirical harm to another. Nor is it primarily "good psychology." Rather, its import is ontological, oriented toward the very being of humanity itself. This is, no doubt, problematic for ears attuned to the metaphysical nominalism that has long reigned in the West, for it assumes a deeply realistic premise, the conviction that *physis* or nature (in this case, human nature) is something real, in which we can share, and from which we can become alienated, rather than a mere abstraction, an insubstantial "universal." Yet neither is this understanding altogether alien to us.

No modern figure has grasped and articulated this insight more powerfully than Dostoevsky, who repeatedly draws upon this Byzantine ontology to question Western nominalism and atomism and invidious individualism, to show that we really are all one, that an injustice to one really is an injustice to all, that each of is responsible for all humanity—a concept that still lingers in the West within the recognition that certain crimes against individuals can be so grave as to also be crimes against humanity. But for Dostoevsky, *every* crime is a crime against humanity, for it sets what is one against itself. The university student Raskolnikov, for example, steeped in Western utilitarian thinking, plans a murder under the belief that it will bring about a greater good. And he finds out to his surprise and to his alarm that he is now alienated, isolated, set at enmity not only with God, but with all humanity,

[17] Maximos, "On the Lord's Prayer," p. 288.

[18] Ibid., p. 301. Italics added.

with every single person he encounters. Isolated too from the earth itself, and from all the other dimensions of life and reality to which his love should have instead brought unity. In his isolation from human nature, he is even isolated from himself. Raskolnikov finds himself, ontologically, in hell. And it is the love of the deeply pious Sonya (whose proper name, "Sophia," "Wisdom," names a feminine face of the eternal Logos) that restores to him his humanity. But if this is the case, then forgiveness as restoration is not primarily about pardon at all, but quite literally about returning the offender to the human race, about a love that would restore to him or her their humanity. And this is precisely what St. Dionysius accomplished for the murderous stranger: through his love for a frightened fugitive, who had severed his unity with humanity and above all with the abbot, he restored to him his humanity, and in this act restored to humanity its own unity.

I would like to conclude along with Maximus, then, that this mystical conception of forgiveness, with its ascetical prerequisites—of which a positivist and consumerist society already stands urgently in need—and which is intelligible only on the assumption of divine grace, represents the highest standard to which we can aspire—even if, as is surely the case, we can only imperfectly ascend to it.

Chapter Eleven Being as Communion: On the Ontology of Love in the Byzantine Tradition

> *Love is a holy state of the soul, disposing it to esteem knowledge of God above all created things.*
>
> St. Maximus the Confessor

> *The man who has found love eats and drinks Christ every day and hour and hereby is made immortal*
>
> St. Isaac the Syrian

> *When we are together, we should be like one single man, in the image of the Triune God who is one single God.*
>
> Elder Sophrony

I

It is with an ingenuous look that each is turned toward the others, yet their reciprocal cognizance is neither timid nor hesitant: they are fully present to one another, they face one another without reserve, holding back nothing. They do not look or gaze "at" or" into" one another, look one another "in the face," as this might be intrusive, invasive. Even less do they look through or past one another. Rather, their heads are lowered in deference, reaching out to one another with upturned eyes, respectful and even reverent. But their regard for one another is completely reciprocal, and these are hardly slavish faces. They are instead unobtrusively firm and powerfully resolute, while at the same time gentle and tender and unguardedly open to the face of the other, strong and yet vulnerable. Inviting yet undemanding faces, without appeal or entreaty beyond that of their own serene beauty. Least of all are they self-assertive, even as they exhibit a mode of presence that is somehow far more masterful than self-assertion. They are the faces, or rather the one single face, of divine love.

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_11

II

A familiar exchange: We have now worked through all of Plato's *Republic*, one book at a time, in this latest rendition of "Introduction to Philosophy." All the lectures and discussions are over, and it is time for last questions before the mid-term. One of the more thoughtful students raises her hand slowly, tentatively, not sure if this is something dumb and obvious, and asks: why is it that Plato, who speaks in the book about almost everything else imaginable, never really discusses love? "Why?" indeed! I answer her that in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, Plato talks a great deal about *erōs*, but at the same time I acknowledge that this is probably not what this student has in mind. Rather, she wants to know why in such a wide-ranging and exhaustive discussion of society and the human soul in their parallel features and destinies, there is just nothing at all said about people having any love for one another. And for this other sense of love, I tell her—just as I tell students who ask this same question about Aristotle—that unfortunately for Plato, he lived roughly four centuries too early to really understand this.

For with Platonic *erōs*, the more pure and more authentic its manifestations, the more depersonalized it becomes: we ascend inexorably from loving some one beloved individual to realizing that it is truly just the soul that we love, to instead properly loving the virtue of that soul, to loving more truly yet the eternal forms that make that virtue and that soul lovable, to finally and most authentically loving the very goodness that makes even the forms themselves supremely lovable. And as the object of love becomes ever more universal and impersonal, so too does the lover—not secondarily, or derivatively, but essentially *since this is the very meaning of the erotic ascent.* Love as we know it or want to know it, love as we perhaps seek it without knowing it, is ontologically impossible for Plato, for the more truly I love, the less am I the individual self that I am, and the more do I become pure mind or *nous* in search of its own authentic, noetic correlate. But must not love, if it is to mean what we want and need it to mean, concern concrete persons rather than universals or essences?

For Aristotle, the problem is just the converse. Here the soul that would love is embedded inextricably in particularity, in just this very psycho-physical, biographically specific matrix that is the determining ground for my liking (*philēsis*) some people and not others, people with whom I will thus be able to share a mutual liking or friendship (*philia*), at least for as long as they happen to remain likeable to me. Far from what we usually mean by "love" being in any sense universal in its range, it counts for Aristotle as a vice to like anyone who is not likeable, as well as to like him more than own his likeability merits.

Why, we thus ask along with Aristotle, *should* we love what is not loveable*? (But why must there be a "why"?)* And how indeed, we ask along with Plato, *can* we really love anything that is simply particular? Isn't it really only what is purified, universal, beyond the ravages of time and change, that is, what is "higher" that is truly loveable? Isn't it much easier and more viable, as so many of Dostoevsky's

characters—such as Ivan Karamazov—finally discover, to love humanity in general, humanity in the abstract, rather than to love actual human persons? *(But perhaps, practically speaking, there is no "how," and this love is rather impossible, miraculous?)* We will not, I shall maintain, be able to find a satisfactory answer to these questions *(and to these questions within questions*) within the limits of pagan Greek philosophy. For not only love itself, but the ontology of the "*person*"—both as the necessary agent and as the indispensable patient, who must alike serve as the subject and the object of love—still awaited the conceptual formulation that would develop only later, in the early centuries of Christian thought and experience, a history that in the West has subsequently been somewhat obscured and forgotten. To the intellectual historian, pursing the lost origination of this mode of love would serve as a case study in the history of ideas. For the Heideggerian ontologist, it would perhaps constitute an unnoticed epoch in the *Seinsgeschichte*, the history of Being itself. But for the believer, it would serve as a testimony, and a most important one, to the reality and the vibrancy of divine revelation.

I leave my audience, then, to choose which schedule of fares they would prefer for what I fear will be in any case a rapid journey over much rough terrain, and that as a result will be rather bumpy and dusty and harshly jolting at times. Hard traveling, and for this I apologize in advance.

III

We have heard, perhaps, of the "four loves" characterized in C. S. Lewis' well-known work: *Storgē*, the affection I develop over time for all that I find familiar and customary. *Philia* or friendship, that peculiar and marvelous mode of liking wherein what I find that I like—in contrast to vanilla ice cream and crisp autumn mornings, which I may also come to like—can sometimes actually like me back, and thus can be my friend. And *Erōs*, which elevates me above the limits and boundaries of ordinary life to a higher sphere. To this list, Lewis could have added yet another family of "loves," affective states that would have been regarded much less positively by the pagan Greeks, for they are modes of *pathē*, being-affected and being-afflicted: those that the German philosopher Max Scheler discusses in his phenomenology of sympathy, and that include commiseration, fellow-feeling, empathy, and ultimately that compassion for the suffering of others that is so important in the religious ethics of Buddhism. (This is what Nietzsche mistook for Christian love, one reason for his harsh rejection of the latter under the rubric of "pity.") All these—the classical Greek loves, as well as the commiseration family of loves—are perfectly "natural," as the scholastics would have put it, and thus these modes require no specifically religious impulse in order to unfold and flourish.

But what about the other mode, the one that I have suggested is missing? Rendering the Latin *caritas* and the Greek *agapē*, Lewis calls this "charity," and he

characterizes it as "gift-love," love that seeks no fulfillment since it arises from no need.[1] At first glance, this would ironically seem to correspond rather well to the cosmic generosity (the "gift-giving virtue") that Nietzsche praised in *Thus Speaks Zarathustra*, and that he felt was *higher* than the Christian love that he mistakenly took to be no more than "pity." But to this gift-character Scheler— himself under the influence of Nietzsche, as well as the Roman Catholic faith to which he had converted—adds that this higher love is radically, pro-actively affirmative of the recipient: affirmative not only of what he is, but of what he could be, saying in essence to the one who is loved, "become what you are!" And unlike Zarathustra's "gift-giving virtue," this affirmation is not ruled by the smug caprice of the *Übermensch*, who dispenses his generosity condescendingly, as a token of his own sovereignty of will, rather than from any genuine regard for the recipient. But if this putatively higher, yet conceptually elusive kind of love is grounded neither in need nor in aristocratic abundance, then from what kind of ground does it arise? Can it be that this love—at least from within a purely mundane, secular, worldly horizon—actually turns out to be in some important sense *groundless*, and thus not humanly possible at all? And even with the posing of this question, we have come quite far already from anything that Plato or Aristotle would have found commendable—far from philosophers for whom everything must have its "ground" or "sufficient reason" for being?[2]

IV

The awareness of each proceeds, without resistance and without remainder, away from its origin and out towards the other, entering inconspicuously into the life of the other and freely merging itself with the other. It is, then, not just that this pure awareness and this unassuming look are not self-conscious: they are not even self-identical. So profound is this procession that each figure from whom each look emanates becomes visually unsustainable in isolation from the other figures. Each figure is transitive, migratory in its very being, even while each at the same time remains entirely peaceful and at rest. Self-possession in self-giving. Each is defined by the relationship into which he enters so profoundly that in each case the source of the procession really presupposes the procession itself, an ontological reflexivity or circularity. This ecstatic self-surrender in its movement from one to the other also sets up a more broadly circular motion, and this motion is mirrored in the

[1] In recent French philosophical circles, a vigorous debate has taken place—largely associated with Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion—concerning the possibility of "the gift." But as will be shown below, the love of traditional Christianity extends so far beyond the notion of gift-giving that the French debate falls well short of it.

[2] Although Leibniz was the first to formally articulate the Principle of Sufficient Reason *(Satz vom Grund),* the principle itself (that everything that is must have a reason or "ground" for why it is, and for why it is such that it is) extends back to the ancient philosophers.

configuration of a perfect circle formed by the outlines of the three figures. The circle is a symbol of eternity, and in this case, it is the eternity— just as it is the face—of divine love. Viewing it, contemplating it, we may distantly feel that if we were somehow able to enter into the life of this circle, we would ourselves be divinized too.

V

Lewis was not the first twentieth century thinker to discuss by name the four loves of *storgē, philia, erōs,* and *agapē*. Almost 50 years earlier, the Russian philosopher Pavel Florensky had written about just these same "loves" in his philosophical masterpiece*, The Pillar and Ground of Truth,* a work untranslated until long after Lewis' death. And in a way that I believe goes well beyond Lewis' examination, Florensky characterizes this "other," extra-classical love as follows:

> As for *agapē,* it is a word that… is wholly alien to the extra-Biblical, ancient secular language. It signifies a love that, through a decision of the will, [becomes] a self-negating and passive self-surrender *for* and *for the sake of* the object. Such a sacrificial love on a secular basis is known only as a fleeting feeling, an inspiration from another world, not as a determination of life-activity. The Biblical *agapē* therefore has features that are not human and conditional but Divine and absolute.[3]

"Features that are not human and conditional but *Divine and absolute*"? "An *inspiration from another world*"? But what, precisely, is it that is so exceptional? Doesn't *erōs* also seem to Plato and the Neoplatonic tradition to be very much something divine, luring and beckoning us to traverse the visible into the invisible? *Agapē*, as it is understood here, however, is not an arrow pointing heavenward, but rather heaven on earth, the invisible made manifest within the visible, the impossible rendered real, the miraculous before our eyes: self-surrender that transcends the ontological abyss between self and other. It is a going-out from the self, an embracing of the other without reason, a renunciation of return. "To love," states Florensky, "is to go over to another, to a brother," and thus to leave the self behind. But how can we accomplish such a journey, such a relocation? Are we not naturally self-interested? Isn't such a giving without expectation of return, as Derrida and others have recently maintained, really impossible? Or more precisely put, isn't an utter departure from self without expectation of return—where what is given-away is the very self that gives—profoundly unnatural, and thus nowhere to be observed, since it defies all laws of psychology?

Yes, yes, and yes. But we listen more carefully to Florensky, without consigning his words to metaphor or hyperbole: "To love is to go over to another, to a brother. For merely human efforts, love for a brother is absolutely impossible. It can be achieved only through the work of God's power. Loving, we love by God and in

[3] Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) pp. 292f.

God."[4] Thus, to love is not only to depart from the self, but to embark from the empirical altogether, from all that would be open to inspection and amenable to social recognition. "True love is a going out of the empirical and the passage to a new reality," and hence would be accessible not to empirical observation, but to spiritual experience alone.[5] Likewise, this departure is at the same time a "mysterious transubstantiation" of the soul itself, and for this reason a "revelation" to the other of divine love.[6] Love is thus not subjective and psychological, but objective and ontological; it forges a bond of identity between the self and other. Divesting the self of itself, proceeding as a self-emptying or *kenōsis* in Greek, the "love of one's brother is a revelation to another, a passage to another, the inflow into another of that entering into Divine life which in the God-communing subject [i.e. the lover] is perceived by this subject [i.e. the loved] as knowledge of the Truth [and thus as a revelation of God, who precisely 'is' Love]."[7] Or we may consider the words of the New Testament, which Florensky is in fact glossing by means of these elaborate philosophical formulations: "Love is of God and every one who loves is [within that very act of loving] born of God, and [through it] knows God. … If we love one another, God dwells within us and His love is perfected in us. … God is love, and he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him." (I John 4: 7, 12, 17)

But the objection will rise, doesn't this raise the stakes too high? Aren't our customary humanisms and philanthropies sufficient, not to mention being far more comprehensible? And can't we be content with identifying love, and even love in the very sense of *agapē*, with "altruistic emotions and the striving for the 'good of mankind.'" Surprisingly, Florensky argues that however good these works may or may not turn out to be, "one could not make a greater error than to identify [them with] spiritual love." For "love" in this altruistic, philanthropic sense "begins and ends in empirical works, the value of which is determined by their visible effects" upon actual entities, whereas the goodness of love is absolute, and not contingent upon discernible consequence and success. Moreover, such an exterior understanding of love is deficient because "the empirical outward appearances… can always be falsified. No age dares to deny that there are 'false apostles, deceitful workers.'" Thus, without the inner life of spiritual love, without this infusion of the Divine Life, the exterior works are lifeless, merely "outward appearance," and thus spiritually vacuous, even when they are not deceptive, seductive, or treacherous to both the altruistic self and his recipient. Love cannot be a transaction between one empirical, psychological self and another, but must find its locus within a different sphere altogether. For what is important, notes Florensky, "is not the outward appearance, not the 'skin,' of special activities, but life full of grace, which overflows in every creative act of a *person*."[8] Thus, "love" in what I am taking as this truest and highest

[4] Florensky, *Pillar*, p. 62.

[5] Florensky, *Pillar*, p. 66.

[6] Florensky, *Pillar*, pp. 63, 67.

[7] Florensky, *Pillar*, p. 67.

[8] Florensky, *Pillar,* p. 65, italics added.

sense, takes place not between one natural being and another, but between "persons." What kind of being, then, is a *person*, that he or she can love and be loved?

VI

What is a "person"? We feel that we must surely know the answer to this question, just as surely as we believe we know what "love" is. Just as surely as St. Augustine felt he knew what "time" was, until he tried to put this understanding into words in Book XI of the *Confessions*. However, the question of the person, of a being who can love, is especially problematic today in view of what often seem to be systematic attempts from many quarters to de-personalize human existence—to depersonalize, and thus (intentionally or not) to forestall the emergence of love. We hear endless reminders, for example, that we are after all really just animals, and beyond this the accusation is put forth that believing otherwise is a kind of "speciesist" arrogance, menacing to the natural environment and to warm, furry creatures everywhere. In philosophical circles, on the other hand, the question of the person is today regarded mostly as the problem of "personal identity," raising certain issues that merge nicely into moral and legal problems of accountability and culpability, and along the way scaring up an entertaining variety of logical conundrums. Useful and amusing studies for a practical age, but a precipitous plunge from the rich context out of which the concept of person first arose. Nor is this original tradition represented by modern philosophers—from Descartes to Fichte to Sartre—that valorize the self-grounding character of the Cartesian I=I, for the latter is itself a severe reduction and distortion of the notion of person, the terminal phase of a decline that had already been underway in Latin Scholasticism.

The history of the concept of the person has yet to be written in its entirety, but one point is clear: the understanding of the person first arises within Christian theology, and it was unknown to classical antiquity. As it was stated by theologian and intellectual historian Georges Florovsky, "*the classical world did not know the meaning of personal being*" nor did it even possess a word that precisely designated it, for the word *prosōpon* held a very different meaning at that time.[9] This understanding of "person," however, first emerges not within Christian anthropology—in the course of reflections on human nature—but in Trinitarian theology, and specifically with the attempts to understand the Divine Being that began prior to the First Nicene Council in the Fourth Century, and which are largely associated with three titanic figures from Cappadocia, in the highlands of Greek Asia Minor: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. Gregory Nyssa. More specifically, the concept of the "person" arose as a central feature of the intellectual landscape that led to the defining "symbol" of traditional Christianity, the Nicene Creed, and that made it possible to understand God as three persons or *hypostases*, who are never-

[9] Georges Florovsky *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century* (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987) p. 32. Italics in the original.

theless "of one essence" or *homoousias*. And in arriving at that formula, these thinkers undertook one of the great intellectual revolutions of human history, articulating the understanding of the person (a) in contrast to the concept of the self-contained, autonomous individual, (b) showing how personhood is relational, rather than substantial, and (c) showing that person must be understood ontologically, rather than psychologically, as has been the case in Western theology and philosophy since Augustine. Although this ontology of the person was not fully elaborated in the patristic era, apart from its employment in Trinitarian controversies, it has been more thoroughly developed in the twentieth century by figures such as Pavel Florensky, Christos Yannaras, Hierotheos Vlachos, and John Zizioulas.[10]

The English word "person" is a translation of the Latin "*persona*," which is itself a translation of the Greek word "*prosōpon*." And in pagan antiquity, a "*prosōpon*" was a "face" that one put on in a situation appropriate to it, and thus it meant something like the English word "role," as in "my role in the organization," or "my role in the family." *Prosōpon* was thus also a theatrical mask, and this was in fact one of its must common meanings. How, then, does what had originally referred to the outward and superficial aspects of life, and even signified the artifice of a performance on stage, come to signify the true inner center of human existence? Yet there was another usage for *prosōpon*, one to be found not in classical writings, but in the Greek of the Septuagint Old Testament. Here the pivotal word *prosōpon* refers to the "face" of God, the "countenance" of God, the "presence" of God that is sought in prayer and supplication: "face" not as what one wears, but as the indispensable and irreducible mode of being-present and facing and above all being-faced—as the definitive mode of existence, the one exemplified by a God who is all-present, and indeed more present to us than we are to one another. *Prosōpon* is inherently relational or referential, for *pros-ōpon* is at its root a turning-towards, the *pros* ("towards") turning of the "eye," "face," or "countenance" (*ōpos)*.[11] Hence, it is that presence or face of God that the Psalmist prays and pleads will not be turned away from him. But isn't this divine countenance or presence itself merely external, the "face" God puts on in His dealings with us? Isn't it external to the divine essence or substance (*ousia*) that constitutes what is underlying (*hypostasis*) beneath and behind this facing? But what if substance (*ousia*) and mode of existence (*hypostasis*) were not the same? Indeed, it was with this distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* that St Basil the Great laid the foundations for the First Ecumenical Council.[12]

[10] See especially John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997). For a critique of the charge that Zizioulas is importing later concepts into the Capaddocian Fathers, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Is John Zizioulas an Existentialist in Disguise? A Response to Lucian Turescu," *Modern Theology*, 20:4, October 2004.

[11] Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007) p. 5.

[12] Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos (Vlachos), *The Person in the Orthodox Tradition* (Levadia, Greece" Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1998), trans. Esther Williams, pp. 70f.

What is revolutionary, then, in Cappadocian theology is *first* the insight that what underlies (*hypostasis*) the Divine Being, its mode of being, is *not* some prior and given nature (*physis*) or essence (*ousia*), but rather *the very facing (prosōpon) itself*—i.e. their understanding that God is not first of all a self-same, fixed substance who subsequently and secondarily enters into personal relation, but rather that the divine mode of existence (*hypostasis*) itself derives from, and is constituted by, the very event of relating or facing. Moreover, this ontological understanding of relationality opens upon a radical freedom, for it implies that is not a fixed essence or substance (*ousia*), a necessity of nature (*physis*) that determines divine action. And the *second* revolutionary character of this understanding of the person is just as surprising: it is that human beings, whom scripture had already described as created in the image (*eikōn*) of God, possess this same radically relational character, and this same freedom, and possess it just because—and realize it just to the extent that—they stand in relation to—find themselves defined by—the divine "facing" that is carried on eternally, "unto ages of ages."

But who, it may be reasonably asked, does the eternal God "face" before the creation of the world? Only God, but God as both Same and Other. For the Cappadocians saw the Divine Being not as a simple, substantial unity (as came to prevail in the West) but as an enacted unity, a unity of relation, an inner unity of *love*! For in what might seem paradoxical, the very exercise of freedom is itself the ecstatic relationality of love: "the only exercise of freedom in an ontological manner is love."[13] And thus the divine mode of being is love, freely unifying the three Persons of the Holy Trinity; love is not subsequent or secondary, but as St Paul reminds us, "God is love." For St. Augustine, in contrast, and for subsequent theology in the West, God is first of all a pure unity who somehow (and in ways for which Augustine found hundreds of pages worth of metaphors in *De Trinitate*) becomes manifest as a threefoldness. But for the Greek East, the threefold facing is itself what is underlying (*hypostasis*), so much so that *prosōpon* (the facing) and *hypostasis* (the underlying) now become synonyms rather than antonyms. More precisely, there are three "facings" and thus three "hypostases," three underlying "facings" whose absolute love for one another brings about their common essence (*ousia*) and in this they are, as absolutely loving "persons," of absolutely one essence or substance (*homo-ousias*) which is based not in an abstract "nature," but in the Person of the Father, from Whom the Son is begotten and from Whom the Holy Spirit proceeds. Indeed, if love unifies and overcomes otherness, then absolute love absolutely unifies, leading us to the remarkable conclusion that the unity of love—*homo-ousian* unity—is more truly unitary than is the abstract unity of simple self-identity. Or, it may be said, this relation is their shared being. Or as John Zizioulas puts it in the title of his most influential collection of writings, from which the title of this paper is borrowed, *being itself is understood as communion.*

[13] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 46.

VII

Outside of this understanding of "person," where identity is realized through relation to an other, there remain as conceptual alternatives the ancient pagan, the modern, and the post-modern understandings of identity, none of which can account for love in a satisfactory way.

(1) For Plato and Aristotle, what is underlying or hypostatic is the nature (*physis*) of an individual, both human nature and his or her own nature as a particular individual. For example, in Aristotle the attributes specific to human nature (*physis*) become materially embedded as individual predispositions (*hexis*) whose aggregate is fixed as individual character (*ethos*). And we always and necessarily act "in character," according to our character—hence our liking for one person and our dislike of another, according to our character. There is no love here, nor is their freedom in the personal sense, and there is no love precisely *because* there is no freedom. Bad characters will like other bad characters, and good characters will like other good characters, according to their respective natures: their goodness or badness is substantial. There is no inner freedom, because there is no inner "person" over and beyond the natural and empirical.

(2) For Descartes and Fichte, it is consciousness itself that is substantial. The I = I of the Cartesian *cogito* becomes what is now truly underlying (the *hypostatis*, or in Latin, the *subjectum* or "subject"). But as modern philosophy from Descartes to Fichte abundantly demonstrates, the principle of the I-am-I not only fails to make contact with the other in love, it finds itself unable to acknowledge the other *as* other, unable even to get far enough outside the enchanted circle of self-positing, self-grounding self-consciousness to be assured that there is an outside at all. The principle of modernity lies in isolation and individuation and atomism, while love is reduced to those ethical formulas and algorithms that can be calculated by a purely impersonal rationality: either the categorical imperative or the principle of utility. As Sartre saw with terrible clarity, the radically individual, isolated I=I is "free" simply because it is, strictly speaking, a kind of "nothingness," so that relationship will be experienced by it as a potential entrapment into what it finds to be the "hell" of the "gaze of the other."

(3) And while in post-modern thought otherness returns with a vengeance, its advent comes at the cost of the person. Here otherness itself becomes hypostatic. An impersonal and faceless and anonymous "*differance*" (as Derrida renders it) is taken as generative of being. And any suggestion of presence itself is accused of being a retrogression into either pre-modern substantialism or modern self-positing consciousness. In the post-modern world, we are adrift in a sea of floating differentials, where it is hard to see how love can be more than liaison, "hook-up" (Deleuze), signification without significance.

In contrast, Florensky (consonant with the tradition of Byzantine philosophy and Byzantine theology as a whole) maintains that there is another path leading beyond the modern isolated and individuated self, one that is neither a reversion to the unfreedom of pre-modern substantiality, nor an effervescence into the insubstantial freedom of the signifier. It is, rather, the courage and the freedom to be caught up in love within the inner life of the Trinity, which means neither more nor less than to be able to love because one has first found oneself to be loved, and to be loved in such a manner that the only way to sustain that being-loved lies in a radical reciprocity that sacrifices all that is characteristic, individual, preferential—and in this "kenotic" response to become aware of one's being as a person. This is not, I would argue, Byzantine *arcana*, nor is it exclusivist apologetics. These are ideas and ideals that have long ago become deeply infused into the fabric of Western thought and culture, and that can to some degree be encountered and retrieved everywhere and by anyone. Or if one is more ontologically inclined, these are now components of our historical being-together that we can evade, but cannot entirely efface—the indices of a high-water mark for interpersonal relations and human community. They have also been embodied powerfully and thematically in the work of one of the finest writers—and one of the greatest thinkers—of the modern age.

Few thinkers have undertaken with more sincerity, intelligence, and persistence the study of human existence than has Florensky's near-contemporary compatriot, Dostoevsky. Few writers—and certainly not Nietzsche—have diagnosed the infirmities of modernity more lucidly than Dostoevsky, nor I believe have any advised more reliable prescriptions for its ills. And for his diagnosis and etiology, as well as his prescriptions, Dostoevsky has relied almost entirely on the pharmacology of Byzantine spirituality, carefully employing as key terms of his analysis the concepts of "love," "person," and "freedom." In *Notes from the Underground*, for example, we come to know the "underground man": willfully frozen into an impotent individualism; substituting a kind of blind and spiteful reactivity for the genuine freedom that would come from an inner, spiritual, personal center; and ultimately spurning the offer of love that would address him as a person, yet to which he is afraid to give himself over.

Or in *Crime and Punishment,* we meet Raskolnikov, whose very name means "schismatic," and who accordingly separates himself from the rest of humanity in a similar attempt to substitute willfulness for freedom, individuality for personhood, and utilitarian formulas for love. And not surprisingly, everything becomes inverted for him. The very "sensible" murder he commits—no "senseless killing" here—brings about not the utilitarian heaven he had anticipated, but the hell of isolation: from God, from other people, from himself, even from the earth itself. The character Raskolnikov discovers within his ruined life what the writer Dostoevsky in his last novel articulates explicitly, that "hell is the inability to love." And the reader, too, discovers along with him the ontological character of love and its grounding in the spiritual reality of the person. What seemed to him the freedom to commit an appalling crime was in fact a yielding to the realm of natural cause and effect, an abandon-

ment not to the other, nor even to the putative autonomy of the modernist self, but to the tyranny of the merely empirical. Without a personal center, he is not only unable to love, but unable to tolerate even the love of his mother and sister—indeed, he is unable even to recognize himself, for he has become "legion," a demonic multiplicity—whereas it is through his gradual experience of the powerfully kenotic love of the prostitute Sonya (a Russian variation on Sophia, or "Wisdom") that he rediscovers divine love, as well as his own spiritual unity as a person, and thus also his own ability to love. (It was for the latter outcome that the novel was censored by the Bolsheviks, not for the axe murder—which they found rather sympathetic and revolutionary.)

Finally, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the figures of the Staretz Zosima and of Alyosha Karamazov exhibit a kenotic, self-emptying or self-sacrificing love that faithfully embodies and powerfully conveys the divine love they have both experienced through the hesychast spirituality practiced in the Russian monastery. Interestingly, both have been dismissed by certain critics as lacking the "individuality" of the other characters, whose pathologies do indeed buffet them about, and certainly do make their "natures"—their inclinations, drives and desires, and traits of character, along with the unfreedom arising from bondage to these natures—evident enough, and in relation to whom the former serve as quiet foci of peace, of lucidity, and above all of love radiating out from a hidden center. Perhaps, then, it is the consummate achievement of Dostoevsky to show that just as the divine being is ultimately mysterious and indefinable, so too is that spiritual being which constitutes us as persons, and which as a kind of groundless ground, enables us to do the impossible, that is, to love one another as God has loved us.

VIII

It is not the subject that moves us, strikes us, and almost inflames us in the work of Rublev, not the number 'three,' not the chalice on the table and not the wings, but the curtain of the noumenal world being unexpectedly ripped down before us, and we, aesthetically, consider important not the means by which the icon-writer achieved this nakedness of the noumenal and whether the same paints and same techniques have ever been in anyone else's hands,—but the fact that he has truly communicated to us the revelation that he has glimpsed. Among the violent circumstances of the time… an infinite, imperturbable, inviolate peace, the 'higher peace' of the Heavenly world was revealed to the spiritual gaze. To the enmity and hatred, ruling on Earth, there was contrasted a mutual love, flowing in eternal harmony, in an eternal, silent conversation, in the eternal unity of the Heavenly spheres. And it is this very inexplicable peace, flowing by a broad stream straight into the soul of the viewer from Rublev's Trinity, this azure, equal to nothing else in the world—more heavenly than

the earthly sky itself… this inexpressible grace of mutual bowing, this most peaceful quiet of nonverbality, this infinite humility before one another, it is this that we consider the creative content of the Trinity [Icon]. Human culture, represented by the tent, the world of life, represented by the tree, and the earth, represented by the rock, all is small and insignificant before this friendship of inexhaustible, infinite love; all is only around it and for it—by the blueness and music of its beauty, by its remaining above gender, above age, above all earthly definitions and divisions, is heaven itself, is unconditional reality itself, is that truly best, which is higher than all existing. Pavel Florensky, "*The Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra and Russia*."[14]

Supplement: The Rublev Icon of the Trinity

The italicized sections in the paper refer to what many regard as the greatest of all icons, St. Andrei Rublev's portrayal of the Holy Trinity, which was written (icons are said to be "written," rather than "painted") in 1411 for St. Sergius' Trinity Monastery in present day Sergei Posad, but which now hangs in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. (Florensky himself lived in and near the monastery for some time, and he regarded it as the spiritual heart of Russia.) In the Orthodox tradition, it is only permissible to present iconically what God has already made manifest visually. How, then, to present the Holy Trinity? In an iconographic tradition firmly established by Rublev, himself a monk as well as an iconographer, the three mysterious visitors to Abraham and Sarah under the oaks of Mamre (narrated in the 18th chapter of Genesis) are seen as "types" or prefigurations of the Trinity. Not only the narrative, but the language of the Genesis passage reinforces the mystery: the syntax switches inexplicably between singular and plural, and the figures themselves are designated both as "men," then as "God." Much later (in Heb. 13:2), they are referred to as "angels."

[14] Pavel A. Florenskij, *The Trinity—St. Sergius Lavra and Russia* (New Haven: The Variable Press, 1995), pp. 24f.

Chapter Twelve *Tō Heteron*: The Problem of Otherness in Western Philosophy and Christian Theology

"… for he who loves [agapōn] his neighbor [ton heteron] has fulfilled the law."

Romans 13:8

The Problem of Otherness in Western Philosophy

While the history of philosophy is often seen as focusing on the problem of unity and multiplicity, the one and the many, an even stronger case can be made for regarding as essential the relation between what Plato calls "the same" and "the other"—stronger, because when it is properly understood, the problem of the one and the many can be seen as derivative from that of same and other. For example, between Plato's two great predecessors, Parmenides and Heraclitus, Parmenides is typically regarded as the philosopher of unity, with Heraclitus the champion of multiplicity. For Parmenides, however, the unity of the One *(tō hen)* is understood by means of the category of the same. Indeed, the first clause of Parmenides' most notable fragment begins with "the same": "*tō auto* (the same) are intellectual intuition *(tō noein)* and being itself *(tō einai)*." The very being of all that is, and the highest kind of knowledge "intellection" *[noēsis]* that is able to comprehend it: these two are bound together within a sameness that makes both of them possible. More than simply akin to one another, intellection and being are united within a sameness more fundamental than either, and that draws them together into one.

But where is the other? Where is that which would articulate otherness and difference within the monolithic unity of the same? It is there, we cannot avoid it—but it is there as unavoidable illusion, epistemological fallenness, "the way of appearance." Speaking from ethereal heights to which he has been spirited by mystical charioteers, Parmenides declares that change, multiplicity, coming-to-be and passing-away are illusory, mere semblance of reality, even if they are appearances that we cannot avoid in our everyday life. Only the unity of the same is real; it is being itself, just as much as it is truth, while change and motion and difference and otherness are simulations

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_12

of being. And while Heraclitus granted ontological status to these features of otherness, he also conceded that their unity was a unity of conflict, *polemos*—that the world itself, the whole order of coming-to-be and passing-away, change, and motion is real, but inherently polemical, a cosmic realm of the war-god Ares, the killing-fields of Homer's *Iliad* woven into being itself. Life against death, time against eternity, the old against the new, or to use these terms in their philosophical sense: One against the Other. Yet at the same time Heraclitus can say that "the world *(kosmos)* is a child at play." (A modern reader might perhaps wonder whether the child in question had a leading role in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.) But the intellectual gambit of finding a "higher" point of view that will harmonize the war of appearances should be familiar to us. It was embraced by the ancient Stoics, more recently by Spinoza, and in our own day by totalitarian world-views as well as certain "naturalistic" thinkers who maintain that all kinds of pain and suffering are justified by a higher harmony of either marketplace competition or ecological homeostasis.

It is Plato, however, who gives the problem of same and other its classical formulation. In his later dialogues, and especially in *The Sophist*, Plato reflects in dialogical fashion (i.e. by means of exchanges between same and other) upon the same (*tō auto*) and the other *(tō heteron) as such.* "The Same" is what he has also called "the Good" in *The Republic* and "the One" in *The Parmenides*. The problem is, if the Good is also the Same, then it is both same and other than itself—i.e. it is both the Good *and* the Same—and thus cannot be the Same at all, but would be other to itself. Likewise with the One: if it is the Same as well as the One, then it is by that very fact the Other. The Other, then, has to be understood as what is outside the One, as what is not One. And the step outside the unity of the One is a step into the Dyad—into the Two. But "two" is itself a "one," bringing unity into the very fulcrum of multiplicity, for without "two," three, four, five, and so on are unreachable. And if this is the case, then we haven't really gotten to the Other at all, since we haven't gotten beyond the One. Whether we begin from the Same or from the Other, thought always seems, in Parmenidean fashion, to revert to the sameness of the same.

Those unfamiliar with Plato's later thought may feel that we have stepped through the looking glass here. But Plato is showing—again, within a dialogue between real, contemporary people—the difficulty *for thought* of truly going beyond the Same, of reaching the Other without incorporating the Other back into the Sameness of the Same. Or perhaps the difficulty is inherent in being itself? Plotinus, the greatest thinker of the subsequent Neoplatonism, showed how reality proceeds from the selfsameness of the One, at each stage introducing new orders of multiplicity. From the One emanates the *Nous* (the Intellection of Parmenides), from the *Nous* the eternal verities, and so on down to the material realm, which is inherently multiplicitous. But is this multiplicity *other*? Yes…. to the extent that it *is*. But it hardly "is" at all, according to Plotinus. For the emanations from the One are at the same time lessenings, diminishments, privations, downgradings…. of the One, and from the One. They are, through their very otherness, and to the extent that they are other, increasing steps into nothingness, into non-being. The Other is other, only to the extent that it lacks being; the concept of otherness regresses into the Platonic notion of *sterēsis*, lack or privation. As was implied by his predecessor Plato, just as

the bad is simply a lack of goodness, the ugly a lack of beauty, materiality a lack of form, time a corruption of eternity—so the Other is a lack *(sterēsis)* of sameness, a mode of non-being. The equation of being, unity, goodness, beauty, and eternity seems to render Western philosophy incapable of comprehending otherness.

The inability to reach the other in Western philosophy gets worse, rather than better, in modernity. This is perhaps just what we should expect, for Forensky argues that Aristotle's law of identity (A = A), the foundation for discursive rationality, is itself founded precisely on of self-consciousness (I = I) as such.[1] Descartes, by overtly grounding philosophy in the reflexivity of self-consciousness, in the self-securing self-awareness of the "I am," raises the specter of solipsism—the belief, and perhaps fear, that *solos ipsum,* "only the selfsame I exists": only the sameness *(ipseity)* of reflexive self-consciousness (Fichte's "I am I") has being. For the first time, it becomes necessary to "prove" the existence of an "external" world—a world external to the self-generating lucidity of the self-identical, self-conscious I. And the problem of "other minds" haunts Anglo-American philosophy to this day. Leibniz, Descartes' German counterpart, responds with the notion of a whole universe of ipseities, "windowless monads," as he puts it. All that is in being, the irreducible unities of the cosmos, are self-enclosed, solitary samenesses mirroring reality only indirectly, through an unfolding of their own inner logic. Windowless units of eternal isolation, without relation to the other. Hegel's Absolute Spirit simply sets loose the avaricious self-identity of the Cartesian I upon the world, whose otherness it consumes in due order. (In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he actually compares consciousness to a hungry animal.) Nietzsche's Zarathustra steps out of his cave like the Neoplatonic One, like the Sun on which the One is modeled, and to which Zarathustra compares himself. All values will emanate from the creator, the envisioned *Übermensch*, like rays from the sun. To his credit, Nietzsche realizes the loss of the other that this entails, noting that for such an individual, there can be no "outside," for what he experiences can only be that which he has created through his own valuations. The low point of this devolution must surely be the Sartrean hero. Bunkered into the paranoid isolation of self-consciousness (the *pour-soi*), he is repulsed by what he now encounters as the brute being of the material world—whose substantial otherness nauseates him—just as much as he is terrified by its opposite, the immaterial gaze of the human other—a gaze that threatens to turn him into an "object" quite as substantial as the tree root that so repulses him.

There are, of course, exceptions to this tendency of Western philosophy, the most notable of them entailing a theistic premise. The Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, for example, tries to show that the self is truly constituted not as Descartes thought—through its conscious relation to itself in its selfsameness—but rather through its consciously relating itself to the absolute other that has created it, i.e. through standing in faith before the presence of the eternal God. That is, the problem of same and other is solved not in thought, but in human existence, in the act of faith. But philosophically, we are left with two identities external to one another: that of the eternal self-sameness of the creator, and that of the finite sameness of the self, which attains

[1] Florensky, Pillar and Ground of the Truth, pp. 23–38.

its selfhood by yielding up its will, yet not by relinquishing its sameness. Indeed, it is precisely by the God-relation, as Kierkegaard puts it, that the self hopes to finally gain its identity. Moreover, this all-consuming relation to the absolute other eclipses, for Kierkegaard, anything more than an indirect relation to the human other.

A second exception is the contemporary French philosopher Levinas, who explicitly revives the problem of same and other, adding to the contemporary philosophical lexicon the terms "ipseity" and "alterity," respectively designating the sameness of the same and the otherness of the other. Levinas maintains that philosophy has had "an allergic reaction" to alterity, consistently tending toward totalization into sameness, rather than acknowledging the "ethical relation" that would disavow any incorporation of alterity (the otherness of the other) into ipseity (the sameness of the same). Parallel to Kierkegaard, Levinas seeks a remedy in the relation of the self-same self to a transcendent God who is irreducibly, absolutely Other. Because God is radically transcendent, He cannot be reduced to any order of the same. The infinity of God, God's infinite otherness, holds open the infinite distance within which the face of the other can be encountered and preserved from the totalizing imperialism of ipseity. God must therefore be radically, infinitely transcendent, to preserve the space of infinity that would resist all totalities. Thus, such an infinitely other God can never be grasped through any kind of presence in the world, but only indirectly, through our relation to the human other. But a God who is radically transcendent in this manner is utterly pure, radically ab-solved from the order of the same, i.e. absolute and absolutely other to the world itself. That is, such a God is an Other who is pure self-sameness, *is* the Same, even in standing outside and beyond the order of the world, standing—as Levinas says, using the language of Plato—beyond being itself. As with Kierkegaard, we are left with two sameness, one that is absolutely transcendent, a Self-Sameness so far beyond compromise that the relation to this Other by the second self-sameness can be carried out only within the ethical relation to the human other. But with Levinas, the relation to the human other is all-consuming, and the relation to God ultimately indirect. Thus, like Kant before him, Levinas ultimately reduces religion to ethics. Moreover, outside the ethical relation to the human other, such a view of God leaves the world just as profane, just as unredeemed, just as ontologically bleak, as the world of Samuel Beckett, whose characters can do no more than pathetically wait upon a God Who will never be present.

The Problem of Otherness in Christian Theology

The acutely problematic character of otherness in modern, secular thought, however, has its antecedents in the Christian thought of the later Middle Ages. Latin scholasticism had over time elaborated an immense *summa* of theology, within which the divine being, the divine understanding, and the divine agency were conceptualized and neatly categorized. The very otherness of the absolute Other—the mystery of the divine being—was absorbed into that intellectual lucidity that constitutes the selfsameness of human rationality, based solely upon the principle of

identity without regard to the paradoxes of mysticism or noetic understanding. The work of Thomas Aquinas in many ways represents the culmination of this project. But a counter-movement had already arisen against this rationalization of the divine being, and it was best articulated by an English monk named William of Ockham. Ockham argued that God is inherently beyond understanding, because He is not bound by reason.

God does what He wills, pure and simple, and to maintain that there are eternal forms, divine ideas, eternal verities, or even moral norms according to which God acts is to limit the divine sovereignty. While Plato, in the *Euthyphro*, had argued that God did what was good because it *was* good, Ockham argued to the contrary that the good is good only because it is what God wills, and for no other reason. Far from the comprehensible, and we may even say domesticated God of scholasticism, Ockham's God is inscrutable and fearsome. And, of course, radically "other" not only to human thought, but to the world itself. God creates the world solely from His own fiat, and it is not for us to comprehend this. Finally, this Occamist concept of God as absolute will, was to be of decisive importance to the Protestant Reformers, such as Luther and especially Calvin, and thus as well to the modernist worldview in general. The "nominalism" that characterized Ockham's philosophical theology came to be known as the *via moderna*, the way of modernity, the first usage of the word "modern" in its present-day sense. It also substantially represents, I believe, the very threshold to modernity itself, long before the rise of modern natural science, and there are two reasons to believe this.

First, if God creates the world solely according to his own will, and not according to eternal forms or ideas, then we simply have to investigate what the world is like to find out how the divine will was employed. We cannot know this beforehand, without investigation, by contemplation alone. And in this way, nominalism becomes the historical cornerstone of modern empiricism. But metaphysically, if God is to be understood primarily as will, and if the divine will is utterly beyond comprehension, then God becomes not just awesome and mysterious, but fearsome and ultimately terrifying, capable of anything. Such a capricious, unpredictable God increasingly becomes seen in modernity as poised menacingly over against the world as its negating, judging other. Hence the modern philosophical assault upon otherness from Descartes to Nietzsche, discussed earlier, can be taken as a kind of self-defense of humanity against such a frightful being—a war waged, above all, upon this kind of malignant otherness and exteriority. Ultimately, as the argument would conclude, after ridding the heavens of this frighteningly unpredictable, unaccountably willful being, humanity appropriates this very willfulness unto itself, takes it up as its own, hard-fought prerogative—an equally frightful platform that quietly goes by the name of "humanism." Thus, all the willful devastation subsequently visited upon both ourselves, and upon the earth we inhabit, can be seen as the consequence of this humanistic appropriation of such adversarial divine sovereignty in the twentieth century.[2]

[2] The philosophical interplay between divine and human will, from Ockham to Nietzsche, is explored insightful by Michael Allen Gillespie in *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*.

Yet Christian thought has resources much richer than those of either scholasticism or the *via moderna*. And in the patristic thought of the first millennium, we can find what early Christian thinkers and believers in fact regarded as the genuine and ultimate solution to the ancient problem of same and other. It is easy to forget that during the first centuries of Christianity, pagans and Christians contended over which schools represented the true legacy of ancient philosophy. (The pagan Plotinus and the Christian Origen, for example, were schoolmates, perhaps debating each other over the correct understanding of the One.) In the Greek East, and even among such Latin thinkers as Augustine, ancient philosophy was seen as an intellectual preparation for the Incarnation, just as the historical experience of a Chosen People in Palestine was seen as its indispensable spiritual preparation. Thus, the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ were understood as resolving the great paradoxes of thought that Greek philosophy could not, on its own, overcome. Above all, in the Trinitarian thought of the great Alexandrian and Cappadocian thinkers—Origen and Athanasius, and Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa—we find an understanding of same and other that can serve as definitive even, and perhaps above all, today. For reasons far too complex to be gone into here—and which must thus support the premise unargued—the radical character of Trinitarian theology, and its implications for the life of the believer, were most purely preserved in the Christian East, where they were first articulated.[3]

In the East, the emphasis was not upon a radical simplicity of God, a self-identity or sameness, that somehow gets articulated and deployed in threefold manner. Rather, the distinctness and otherness of the three persons (*hypostases* in Greek) was emphasized to such a degree that the Capadoccians were accused of being tritheists. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are radically distinct, radically other, co-eternal subsistences (a more literal translation of *hypostasis*) that are nevertheless just as radically one: *homo-ousias*—con-substantial, as the Latin translates—or more literally, of *the same being*! How is this possible: that the most radical otherness, the ultimate alterity that makes every other kind or degree of otherness possible, is at the same time an equally radical sameness, indeed the *same being* (*homoousia)*? It is because God is an enacted and eventful unity, a unity of communion within the divine being—constitutive of the diving being—a unity or sameness of love. The ultimate unity, true sameness, is not as the Neoplatonists thought, a simple identity, nor is it that kind of unity manifested within some plurality. Rather, it is a unity of

[3] One disarmingly commonplace reason for this is simply that Augustine, by all admission the most powerful formative influence on the Western Church, was not fluent in Greek, and hence had no direct access to the conceptual vocabulary that was transformed into the Church's teaching on the Holy Trinity. A more decisive influence was the later addition of the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed. Maintaining, also under the influence of Augustine, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son, the monarchical principle of unity in the Father is undermined, leaving only a mysterioius (or better, abstract) substantial unity (a unity in *essentia*, in Augustine's terms) to provide the source of unity, rather than the primacy of the Father, from whom the Son "is begotten" and the Spirit "proceeds." Given this, the task is merely to provide analogies (Augustine liked those drawn from human psychology) to help the reader become comfortable with what he could never understand.

love that does not efface otherness as if it were a negativity, but rather that demands and presupposes otherness—a unity that is radical sameness only *because* it unites what is and remains radically other. It is absolute sameness within what is absolutely other. It is, in the words of Metropolitan John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion.*

This unity, however, is not abstract, but personal: a unity of persons, a relationship that is so radical that our worldly experience illuminates it only in the most profound, the most holy, moments of our lives—indeed, those moments in which we are blessed to step from the world into the Kingdom of God. For at the very source and ground of all that is, Trinitarian thought—derived not from specualtive theology, but from the Trinitarian experience of the Church—finds a radical unity of love, communion, and self-emptying. It is through self-emptying (*kenōsis*) that from the Father the Son is eternally begotten, and the Spirit eternally proceeds—a self-emptying through which the Father *grants divinity* to the Son and the Holy Spirit! In the words of Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky: "Surmounting of the monad: the Father is a total gift of His divinity to the Son and to the Spirit. Were He only a monad, were He to identify with His essence instead of giving it, He would not be fully a person."[4] Were there time, the rich relations of kenotic love within the Trinity could be elaborated at length, as they in fact are in the great hymns of the Eastern Church. The three persons, for example, each and reciprocally efface themselves and testify to the others, reveal the others. Moreover, it is through this kenotic self-giving that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cooperate to give creation its own being—a being that really is its own, and is not constantly emergent from divine fiat, as in Islam—and above all cooperate to give spiritual beings their own radical freedom that extends even to the possibility of not loving, of rejecting the Other—i.e. of "sin." All this must be seen as a self-emptying and self-giving of the divine persons. It is also through this self-emptying that the Son becomes Incarnate and subjected to death and burial within His own creation, without compromising His own divinity and eternity.

Thus, if sin is primordially the rejection of the absolute Other, if as Zizioulas puts it, "the essence of sin is the fear of the Other, which is part of the rejection of God…. [then] reconciliation with God is a necessary pre-condition for reconciliation with any 'other.'"[5] Thus, the metaphysical problem is not an abstract quandary concerning the concepts of same and other, but the rather the problem—spiritual, moral, political, cosmic, *and* metaphysical—of *fallen* otherness, the refusal of love, the usurpation of gift, the fear of the other as the blind self-assertion of the same. Theology, as both Kierkegaard and Levinas intimate, must be lived as well as thought, thinkable because it has been lived. How this is possible is best illustrated in the lives of those "spiritual athletes" known as monastics, those who give their lives up entirely to living the Life of the Holy Trinity through prayer, fasting, and above all through that humility which allows them to be partakers of the very life of the Trinity, participants in the self-giving *kenōsis* which constitutes the communion

---

[4] Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction,* St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977, p. 44.

[5] Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon, "Communion and Otherness."

of same and other in the eternal Godhead. And in this way, they show all of us what spiritual life can be, ought to be—just as Olympic athletes show us what running and diving and dancing are really all about. A few examples will have to suffice, taken mostly from the highly aphoristic writings of Archimandrite Vasileios, Abbot of Iveron Monastery on Mt. Athos in Greece.

The true monk, he argues, is the one who has attained the truth. But truth here is by no means something propositional. This truth is found through withdrawal, not from other people, but from worldliness and from the tumultuous passions of the world. "What is true," he writes, "is full of stillness, it is calm… the whole truth is to be found in a state of stillness, and the whole truth sees everything as a blessing… "[6] This kind of solitude or aloneness (Greek *monas*, from which "monastic" derives) brings us into the truth, because it brings us into a quiet or stillness (Greek *hesychia*, from which "hesychasm" derives) which reveals the true, but hidden, community of all—the communion with the other that the passions overlay, conceal, and thus falsify. The monk "has separated himself from everything and united himself with everything…. the significance of the monk is that he is not alone, he is with everyone else."[7] Separating himself from the passions that falsely promise to unite him with certain things, yet in fact merely serve to separate him from everything else, the true monk (who need not live in a monastery) finds room within himself for everything. Ascetic solitude is in fact the very opposite of isolation. "You go away, and by going away you are led into the communion of all"[8] Key to this withdrawal from passion and inner disturbance is humility, which Fr. Vasileios sees as a self-emptying, a self-dissolution, the life of the person who does not live for himself but lives for the whole world, whose life is a prayer for the whole world:

> the one who dissolves his own self and lives for the other. The others are his life. And he does this in such a way that he feels it was not his own action; it was a gift that was given to him… This humble man has received an embrace from Christ, from God, and has himself become god by grace, and wants to be dissolved, to empty himself, to cease to exist in order that the other may exist.[9]

Remarkably, Fr. Vasileios finds example of such persons—true persons, whom he calls "the young, the dear, the ever-living [ones] who [have] a place in our heart and will be with us even in the grave"—not only in such great monastic figures as St. Isaac the Syrian, but also in Dostoevsky and Kafka. These are writers, he maintains, who are not obsessed with themselves, but just the opposite. They are those whose truthfulness and humility—and perhaps the very stillness from which all truly great writers must write if they are to show the truth, the community, the interconnections, within the otherness which as writers they must seek out—display their kinship with more overt and obvious monastics. Nor is it merely for the human other, but for nature too that the monastic gives up himself, and accordingly no Eastern

---

[6] Archimandrite Vasileios, *The Christian in a Changing World: Monasticism and the New Realities of Life*, Alexander Press 1996, p. 36.

[7] Ibid, pp. 15, 9.

[8] Ibid. p. 22.

[9] Ibid. p. 12.

hagiography is complete without tales of friendship and community with animals and natural surroundings of the sort that in the West are to be found almost exclusively in the life of Francis of Assisi.

It is, then, the thesis of this chapter that the solution to the problem of the other is to be found in the Christian life—the life that seeks to participates in the self-emptying, self-giving life of the Holy Trinity—the life that gives itself away, abandons itself for the sake of the other, that the other may be, and that it might above all participate in the kenotic love through which the eternally same-in-other God creates and sustains the world, and re-unites it to Himself. Nor can love for, and even union with, such a God, if it is genuine, ever exclude the other. For the Trinitarian God is not an identity over against the other, but rather an otherness whose dynamic unity is enacted through kenotic, other-directed love—whose very being is love, all-inclusive community. To love such a God, to unite oneself with such a God, is necessarily to enter into the life of *kenōsis* that seeks out otherness precisely to abandon oneself to it. Otherness, then, as the philosophical tradition could never discover through thought alone, is neither privation nor negation, but rather the precondition for the very identity, the very unity, the very sameness that, without understanding the fact, it had truly been seeking all along.

Chapter Thirteen The Prayer of the Heart, and the Heart of Prayer: On the Eastern Orthodox Practice of Prayer

"If you are a theologian you pray truly. If you pray truly you are a theologian." (Evagrius Ponticus, The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer, trans. John Eudes Bamberger OCSO (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981) p. 65. The translation of this passage in The Philokalia, Vol. I, p.62, cited below, has also been consulted here.)

Evagrius of Pontus

Introduction

For many people, the topic of prayer in Orthodox Christianity will recall the so-called Jesus Prayer, usually as portrayed in that classic of spirituality, *The Tale of a Pilgrim.* Here, a man who describes himself as "by vocation a homeless pilgrim, a man of mean estate who wanders from place to place," journeys in search of an answer to a perplexity. Having heard, during Sunday Liturgy, St. Paul's injunction in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians (5:17) to "pray without ceasing," the pilgrim sets out to discover what this could mean and how it might be possible: to pray ceaselessly. In the course of his travels across the Russian land, after discoursing with many people, and acquiring a copy of the *Philokalia*, the great masterwork of Orthodox spirituality, he finds an answer in a special prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." He begins to repeat this in increasing numbers of repetitions until, to his delight, the prayer establishes itself in his heart, praying itself without ceasing. This becomes to him a deep source of boundless joy and spiritual transformation, and he realizes in the process that this prayer is in fact "an abridgement of the entire Gospel," and a vehicle for living constantly in the presence of God.[1]

[1] Pentkovsky, Aleksei (ed.), *The Pilgrim's Tale* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999) pp. 49, xi.

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_13

The reputation of this work is richly deserved, but it may at the same time lead the reader into two distorted views of prayer in the Eastern Church. First, it may suggest that the Jesus Prayer, as it is practiced by the Russian Pilgrim, represents the essence of Orthodox prayer life, the lens through which everything else should be viewed. Second, it may lead to the belief that the Orthodox practice of prayer is a rather exotic affair, largely unrelated to prayer as it is experienced elsewhere.

Thus, I will first very briefly contextualize the Jesus Prayer in the prayer life of the Church, and then go on to outline, in a broadly phenomenological manner, the main features of prayer in the Eastern Church, in hopes of showing that understood properly, this can offer some important insights into the very nature of prayer itself. Along the way the Russian Pilgrim will appear from time to time, and I will conclude with a note on the relation between prayer and action.

Part One: The Prayer Life of the Eastern Church

Corporate Prayers

In the Orthodox Church, the daily cycle of prayer features seven sets of hymns and prayers, beginning at sunset—which, consonant with its Jewish roots, Orthodox Christianity regards as the end of the old day and the beginning of the new. Byzantine time, which is still observed on Mt. Athos and in certain other monastic settings, regards the time of sunset each day as midnight, the breaking of a new day. Beginning at sunset, then, is *Hesperinos* or Vespers, the Evening Prayer, which is later followed by Compline, the Midnight Prayer, and then *Orthros* or Matins, the Morning Prayer, followed by the First Hour (6:00 AM), the Third Hour (9:00 AM), the Sixth Hour (12:00 Noon) and Ninth Hour (3:00 PM). All of these are contained in the *Horologion*, and to them are added hymns and prayers specific to the seasons and saints of the Church, most notably the *Theotokos* or Mother of God. On Sundays, and other days when Divine Liturgy will be celebrated, it immediately follows Orthros. Each segment of this daily, sevenfold liturgical cycle draws heavily upon the Psalms, so that the Psalter is read in its entirety each week, and twice per week during Great Lent. This love of psalmody in traditional Christianity is expressed beautifully by St. Basil the Great:

> When the Holy Spirit saw that the human race was guided only with difficulty toward virtue, and that, because of our inclination toward pleasure, we were neglectful of an upright life, what did He do? The delight of melody He mingled with the doctrines, so that by the pleasantness and softness of the sound heard we might receive without perceiving it the benefit of the words, just as wise physicians who, when giving [to] the fastidious rather bitter drugs to drink, frequently smear the cup with honey. Therefore he devised for us these harmonious melodies of the Psalms, that they who are children in age, or even those who are youthful in disposition, might to all appearances chant but, in reality, become trained in soul… [and even] if, perchance, someone becomes exceedingly wrathful, when he begins

> to be soothed by a Psalm, he departs with the wrath of his soul immediately lulled to sleep by means of the melody.[2]

And in his praise of psalmody, Basil at the same time articulates a central feature of the Orthodox understanding of prayer: the therapy and healing of the soul.

Prayer is generally practiced standing, sometimes kneeling, sometimes during prostration (especially during periods of common penitence, such as Great Lent), and never sitting, which would be seen as a sign of disrespect. At various points during these services, prayers are said for those who are sick or in need, along with prayers for the dead, with whom the Church nourishes the bonds of community. Indeed, the voice of prayer within the visible Church is understood and experienced as joining itself to the prayers of invisible orders: with those who are no longer visibly with us, especially the saints, and with the ceaseless prayer of the celestial orders.

Individual Prayers

Most of the prayers employed in Orthodox prayer books are drawn from the liturgical cycle. Hence, even when praying alone, one is joined with the prayers of the church being said at the same time in monasteries, churches, home prayer-corners around the world. Individuals are to have a rule of prayer, usually including at least Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, and as many of the other hours as possible. An observant Orthodox home will have a Prayer Corner with icons and a vigil lamp, and ideally the rule of prayer will be one that is shared and pursued collectively by the entire family. Observant Orthodox Christians also pray throughout the day, frequently through making the sign of the cross (from right to left, and with the tips of the thumb, index finger, and middle finger touching one another to signifiy the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, and the last two fingers touching the palm, to signify the human and divine natures of Christ) before various activities of the day, or when faced with challenges or temptations. This sign is itself a prayer: "In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Inner Prayer and the Prayer of the Heart

All monastics, and many clergy and laity, also practice differing kinds and degrees of ascetic prayer, variously called inner prayer, or the prayer of the heart, and centered upon the Jesus Prayer. Often these involve the use of a prayer rope (*chotki* in Russian and *komboskini* in Greek), and sometimes certain kinds of postures and

[2] Saint Basil, "Homily on Psalm 1," *Exegetic Homilies,* trans. Sister Agnes Clare Way CDP, "The Fathers of the Church," Vol. 46 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963) p. 152.

breathing. It is always emphasized that these ascetic practices must be pursued only under the direct guidance of a spiritual director, and that they effect nothing that cannot also come about in the ordinary course of pious, prayerful worship and living.

Part Two: A Topography of Prayer in Orthodox Practice

1. *Presence of God.* To pray, in the Orthodox understanding, means above all to enter into the presence of God. Nor is this understood figuratively, as we might say that looking at the "heads" side of a penny puts us in the presence of Lincoln. It is more like meeting someone in person: you are either there or you are not. Thus, all prayer would be mystical in intent, aimed at an encounter with the divine presence. But doesn't this make God all too immanent, too much an existent to be experienced among other existents? The answer rests upon the critical distinction between the divine essence *(ousia)* and the divine energies *(energeia*) or divine activities. The divine *essence* is shrouded in mystery, forever unknowable, beyond experience even for the highest orders of angels and archangels. But the divine *energy* or activity surrounds us, permeates us and all things. To pray, then, is to open our awareness to a contact that has already been made, to be present to the One who is already present to us. And it is this presence to God that defines prayer, not vocalizations or subvocalizations. For without the former, the latter is not truly prayer. And the latter by itself is sufficient to constitute true prayer. So if the divine energies "fill all things," as one of the great prayers of the Church puts it, then prayer is by no means a withdrawal from what surrounds us. "Any increase in the depth of existence," writes Olivier Clément, " any perception of mystery in the presence of love or of beauty or of death leads to prayer."[3]
2. *Avoiding Representations*. From this definition of prayer as standing within the divine presence, a second characteristic follows: the avoidance of mental imagery or representations of any kind. For if God is Person, and indeed the ontological ground of all personhood, then all our experience with other persons tells us this: that we must abandon preconceptions if we are to experience the person himself, and not just our own thoughts and opinions. This distances Orthodox prayer from the practices of some other religious traditions which encourage the imagination, through the practice of what is sometimes called "meditation," for example in the Ignatian "Exercises." If what we seek is the divine presence itself, and not a reiteration of own thoughts about God, then it would behoove us to empty our minds of prior thoughts. Evagrius, for example, prescribes: "when you are praying, do not shape within yourself any image of the Deity, and do not let your intellect be stamped with the impress of any

---

[3] Clément, Olivier, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Text and Commentary,* trans. Theodore Berkeley O.C.S.O., and Jeremy Hummerstone (London: New City Press, 1998), p. 81.

form… making you imagine in your conceit that the Deity is there." Instead, he urges that we "approach the Immaterial in an immaterial manner."[4] Orthodox prayer, then, in this one particular respect enters into a closer proximity with the unclouded mind prescribed by Zen, or within the Hindu tradition as understood as embodied in the talks and teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti, than to Tibetan and Latin traditions that encourage vivid mental imagery. Indeed, St. Nils Sorsky and many others after him in the Byzantine East warn that "vivid imaginings" of any kind can lead to what in Russian is called *prelest*, spiritual delusion, in which psychological and even demonic elements can convince the seeker that he is the favored recipient of divine instruction: "In order not to fall into *prelest*," writes Sorsky, "do not permit yourself any concepts, images, or visions."[5] But what about the prominent use of icons in Orthodox spirituality? Are these not images too? Indeed, they are, and formal prayer is usually practiced standing before icons. Yet several elements of the icon in fact lead away from the dangers inherent to mental imagery, rather than towards them. First, the icon is external to the mind, an independent reality leading us away from ourselves and our own mental events. Second, icons are prayerfully crafted by artists who have inherited a living tradition of sacred art, whose sole purpose is not to create things that are beautiful in any secular sense, but to create a living ink between the visible and the invisible. Third, icons are sacramentally blessed, and serve as a mystical, ontological link, a passageway, between the divine and the mundane. They are windows rather than pictures, *Darstellungen* rather than *Vorstellungen*, employing an "inverse perspective" that reverses the perspectival "vanishing point" back toward the viewer, rather than into an infinite distance away from him. In a critical sense, for the Orthodox believer, to stand in the presence of the icon of Christ is to stand in the presence of Christ Himself. In Orthodox practice and teaching, the divine energies inhabit and animate the icon in a sacramental manner.

3. *Descent to the Heart.* In an important sense, to pray is to return to paradise, where we once walked innocently in the immediate presence of God. In the ascetic theology that Orthodoxy has continued from patristic times, the fall from grace—the expulsion from the Garden—is understood with reference to the inner life. Our fallen condition, according to this view, consists in the mind (*nous*, or perhaps better, consciousness) abandoning its natural home in the heart, and becoming entangled with the many thoughts (*logismoi*) that constantly bombard us. Meanwhile, the heart—the natural center of our life, as seen not just in ascetic theology, but consistently throughout the Bible, and ruled by the desires and passions. But to pray truly—and to truly pray—is to pray from the heart, and it is stressed that it is in the heart that God can be met.

[4] Palmer, G.E.H., Sherrard, Philip, and Ware, Kallistos (eds.), *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, compled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth, Volume Two* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981) p. 63.

[5] Kadloubovsky and E. M. Palmer, trans., *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology, compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 101.

"By prayer," states St. John Chrysostom, "I mean not that which is only in the mouth, but that which springs up from the bottom of the heart."[6] Thus, the *nous* must return to the heart, first by becoming *neptic* or watchful over the thoughts or *logismoi* that have held it captive—a mindfulness that displays certain similarities to that employed in Buddhist practice—and ultimately by returning to the heart— i.e. through a psychological and, indeed, ontological re-centering of our being from the head back into the heart. "You should descend from your head to your heart," St. Theophan instructs, and Bishop Hilarion comments: "when the mind is located in the head, it is very much subject to distraction… [Whereas] in order to concentrate [during prayer] it is necessary to relocate the mind in the heart."[7]

Orthodox ascetic practices have charted numerous techniques for assisting in this return to the heart, many of them associated with the Jesus Prayer, and all of them requiring the ongoing oversight of an experienced spiritual director. But these are only aids, not essentials. What is essential is that the heart be warmed, that through the *nepsis* or attention of the returning *nous*, we purify it of desires that disfigure it, and restore the heart to its natural functioning. An anecdote, a true story, may be helpful here. An aspiring young monk traveled to Mount Athos and sought out a noted *Geronda* or Elder for spiritual guidance. After speaking with the young man, the discerning Elder went to his bookshelf and handed the young man not some esoteric volume of spiritual instruction full of hidden secrets, but a copy of Dickens' *David Copperfield.* Seeing the disappointment on the young man's face, the Elder responded: "Unless you first develop normal, human, Christian feelings and learn to view life as little Davey did—with simplicity, kindness, warmth, and forgiveness—then all the Orthodox spiritual writings will be of little benefit to you."[8]

4. *The Role of Compunction.* Along with *nepsis* or watchfulness, there is another vital dimension to the healing of the heart, centered around the spiritual acts associated with compunction *(katanyxis),* repentence *(metanoia*), and ultimately *penthos*, perhaps best translated as joyful grief. Here, I will add, there is a parting of the ways between Orthodox prayer and many spiritual traditions of East Asia, for these affective states can live and sustain themselves only in relation to a personal deity. Yet it is perhaps even farther removed from the "guilt feelings" often associated with Western Christianity and which are regarded pastorally in the East as undesirable, since they presuppose the spiritual pride from which individual self-judgment invariably proceeds.

   Compunction, *penthos*, repentance come not from what Nietzsche calls the self-inflicted "bite of conscience," but rather emerge naturally as we begin to enter into the divine presence, and only thereby experience how great is the

[6] Cited in Clément, p. 182.

[7] Alfeyev, Bishop Hilarion, *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002) p.177.

[8] Hieromonk Damascene, *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works* (Platina, CA: St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2003) p.959.

distance that our shortcomings place us away from Him. (They are, for this reason, associated with holy longing, or *erōs*, discussed below.) Writing in the *Philokalia*, St. Gregory Palamas maintains that we can enter into a state of union with God only "when our prayer, through its fervent compunction (*katanyxis*), transcends the passions (*pathē*) and conceptual thoughts (*logismoi*).[9] This is joyful sadness, solace-filled grief, since to the extent that we repent of, move beyond, these impediments, the heart is filled with the joy of divine grace—just as confession of our wrong-doing to the person we have wronged, and from whom we have distanced ourselves, reunites us to him. As noted by St. John Climacus, "That which is called mourning and grief should contain joy and gladness interwoven within it like honey in the comb."[10] Repentance is heartwarming, restores to us a tender heart, heals us from our hard-heartedness. Hence, the predicate of the Jesus Prayer is *metanoietic*: *"have mercy on me, a sinner!"*

5. *The Power of the Name.* The first half of the Jesus Prayer—*"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God"*— provides the subject of the prayer, naming not the praying subject, noted in the second half only as "a sinner," but the subject to whom the prayer is made. Moreover, it specifies the only indispensable element of the prayer, the Name of God. Indeed, some shorten the prayer even to the point of saying only *"Lord Jesus Christ,"* or even simply, *"Jesus."* And this element is indispensable because of the Orthodox belief, held in common with much traditional religious practice, that there is an ontological power to the names of God, evocative of God Himself. "The Name of the Son of God is great and boundless," says *The Shepherd of Hermas*, one of the earliest Christian texts, "and holds up the entire universe."[11] So too, most Orthodox prayers invoke one of the names of God—Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Holy Trinity, etc.—rather than the abstract, generic noun, "God." Naming is invocation, and hence the use of the name puts us in the presence of God, whether we are aware of it or not. Accordingly, the Jesus Prayer can never be a mere mantra, soothing and calming through phoneme and sound, and Elder Sophrony emphasizes that to treat it as such is to violate the commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."[12] Writes Father Sergei Bulgakov of the Jesus Prayer: "The power of the prayer is not in its content, which is simple and clear (it is the prayer of the publican), but in 'the most sweet name of Jesus.' The ascetics

---

[9] Palmer, G.E.H., Sherrard, Philip, and Ware, Kallistos (eds.), *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, compled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth, Volume Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995) p. 343.

[10] Saint John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1991) p. 76 (Step 7: 49).

[11] Cited in Ware, Kallistos, "The Power of the Name: The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality," in Behr-Sigel, Elizabeth*, The Place of the Heart: An Introduction of Orthodox Spirituality* (Torrance, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1992) p. 147.

[12] Archimandrite Sophrony, *On Prayer,* trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996) p. 143.

testify that this name has in itself the power of the presence of God. Not only is God invoked by this name, but He is already present in the invocation."[13]

6. *Paradox of Circularity.* Seen in this way, prayer seems to presuppose itself. In many Orthodox prayers, we ask God to help us pray. "Teach me to pray," says the famous Prayer of the Optina Elders. But logically, this is circular, for if we must pray to God in order to learn to pray, then we must either already know how to pray (in which case the request is needless) or be unable to complete the request itself (in which case it is pointless). "Before we pray," states St Porphyrius, "the soul must prepare itself with prayer."[14] Metropolitan Anthony Bloom writes: "In order to be able to pray, we must be within the situation that is defined as the Kingdom of God."[15] But how do we arrive at that situation other than through prayer? Moreover, St. Ignatii Brianchaninov reminds us that prayer presupposes "the fulfillment of the Gospel commandments," especially the commandment to love our neighbor: "the first preparation [for prayer] consists in rejecting resentment and condemnation of our neighbors."[16] But the Gospel at the same time teaches that love is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and thus acquired only through prayer. But as with all such paradoxes, and as Christ taught, when the need arises to place a camel through the eye of a needle, with human beings these things are not possible, but with God they are.
7. *God Prays Within Us.* The Prayer of the Optina Elders does not simply end with the request to be edified. Rather, it goes on: "Teach me to pray. Pray Thou Thyself within me." That is, we can pray, can enter into the divine presence, only as divine grace warms our heart, as the Spirit moves within us, as He makes known his presence to us. Says St Paul in his letter to the Galatians: "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out 'Abba, Father!'" (4:6) And in the letter to the Romans: "we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (8:26). Moreover, it is because God prays within the heart that we can meet Him there. "The ladder that leads to the Kingdom is hidden within you," writes St. Isaac the Syrian, "and is found in your own soul." (AP 164). And in the twentieth century, St Porphyrios enjoins: " In order not to live in darkness, turn on the switch of prayer so that divine light may flood your soul. Christ will appear in the depths of your being. There, in the deepest and most inward part, is the Kingdom of God. *The Kingdom of God is within you*."[17] "Only through divine grace can you

[13] Bulgakov, Sergius, *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988) p. 147.

[14] Sisters of the Holy Convent of Chrysopigi, *Wounded by Love: The Life and Wisdom of Elder Porphyrios* (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey Publisher, 2005) p. 113.

[15] Wybrew, Hugh (ed.), *Creative Prayer: Daily Readings with Metropolitan Anthony* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd Ltd., 2004) p. 38.

[16] Brianchaninov, Bishop Ignatius, *The Arena: An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1977) pp. 66f.

[17] *Wounded by Love*, p. 113.

pray," he continues. "No prayer can occur without divine grace." And "when grace comes, when love comes, you say the name 'Christ' and your mind and heart are flooded."[18]

8. *Stillness*. Orthodox spirituality, especially as it is practiced in monastic settings, is called Hesychasm, from the Greek word *hesychia*, meaning stillness, quietness, tranquility. Clearly, to be able to calm the passions and the current of thoughts, to let the mind settle back into the heart, to enter into the presence of God, requires stillness, serenity, as well as sincerity and even a certain ingenuous quality. It is not simply, or even primarily silence (as *hesychia* is sometimes translated) but "an attitude of listening to God and openness toward Him."[19] "In your prayer time," writes Evagrius, "rid yourself of everything that harasses you… be an ignorant and simple and at the same time a pensive child."[20] Even beyond this, St. Heychius links stillness with watchfulness and attentiveness, and so too with "purity of heart, a state blessed by Christ when He says: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for the shall see God.'" (Matt. 5:8)… Attentiveness is the heart's stillness, unbroken by any thought. In this stillness the heart breathes, and invokes, endlessly and without ceasing, only Jesus Christ."[21] This attitude of *hesychia* is summed up nicely by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware: It is not simply "a temporary cessation of speech," he maintains, but something "highly positive: an attitude of attentive alertness, of vigilance, and above all of *listening*. The Hesychast, the person who has attained *hesychia*, inner stillness or silence, *is par excellence* the one who listens. He listens to the voice of prayer in his own heart, and he understands that this voice is not his own but that of Another speaking within him… True inner prayer is to stop talking and to listen to the wordless voice of God within our own heart."[22]
9. *Love and Longing*. The Orthodox Church has never embraced a sharp distinction between love in the uniquely Christian sense (*agapē*) and longing (*erōs*), but rather sees them as interrelated, interwoven, and sometime synonymous. St Porphyrios writes: "In prayer what is important is not the duration, but the intensity. Pray albeit for five minutes, but abandoning yourself to God with *love* and *longing*."[23] Why both, loving and longing? We are able to love what we know, and what is present, but we must instead long for, and crave, that which is not yet present, that of which we are only partially cognizant and desire to know more, know better, know more fully—into whose presence we wish to enter. But of course we never fully enter into that presence of God that we always already inhabit, never fully possess God in knowledge, but rather

[18] Ibid, p. 119.

[19] *Philokalia*, Vol. I, p. 365.

[20] Cited in Clément, p. 185.

[21] Palmer, G.E.H., Sherrard, Philip, and Ware, Kallistos (eds.), *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, compled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth, Volume One* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979) pp. 162f.

[22] "Power of the Name," pp. 135, 137.

[23] *Wounded by Love,* p. 128, italics added.

through a paradoxical movement the closer we come, the greater we realize our distance, inciting us to move "from glory to glory," in the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa, that great poet of Christian *erōs*. If we are to remain on this path, writes Porphyrios, "we require divine *erōs*, divine, burning love of Christ. *Erōs* directs itself to a higher being. The Lover, God, desires the beloved, and the beloved strives to reach the Lover. The Lover loves His beloved with a divine and perfect love… The grace of God requires divine *erōs*. Love is sufficient to bring us into a suitable frame of mind for prayer."[24]

10. *Cosmic Dimension:* We have already noted that the Orthodox Church believes that its prayers are joined together with a ceaseless harmony echoing through invisible orders. But even within the visible, prayer is not restricted to humanity. Let us listen once more to the Russian Pilgrim: "When I began to pray with my heart… everything surrounding me took on a delightful form: the trees, the grass, the birds, the earth, the air and the light. All things seemed to be… praying and singing the glory of God. And I understood from this what the *Philokalia* calls *the knowledge of the speech of all creatures*."[25] This sense is strong, too, in Porphyrios: "Very soon birds will start to come to the monastery. They will hear the bell and they will come to eat. They will sit outside and listen to the Vespers. They are our companions from the forest who will come to participate in our prayer." And on Pascha, the Feast of the Resurrection, he exclaims joyfully: "today all things are praying—the earth, the sky, the stars, the fragrant flowers, the bubbling streams, the trilling nightingales, the fluttering butterflies—all are singing 'Christ is Risen."[26] The teaching behind this sensibility is put well by the Russian theologian, Fr. Sergei Bulgakov:

> One trait of the Orthodox Church must be noted particularly—that is its cosmic quality. It is addressed not only to the human soul but to all creation, and it sanctifies the latter. This sanctification of the elements of nature and of different objects expresses the idea that the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is extended by the Church over all nature. The destiny of nature is allied to that of man; corrupted because of man, she awaits with him her healing. On the other hand, Our Lord, having taken on Himself true humanity, has joined His life to all of nature. He walked on this earth, He looked at its flowers and its plants, it birds, it fish, its animals, He ate of its fruits. He was baptized in the water of Jordan, He walked on its waters, He rested in the womb of the earth, and there is nothing in all creation (outside of evil and sin) which remains foreign to his humanity. So the Church blesses all creation….[27]

And deeper yet lies the ancient patristic view, best articulated by St. Dionysius the Areopagite, who depicted all creation as hierarchically ordered in its aspiration for union, each according to its kind, with the Creator of All—i.e. each prayerfully seeking to realize—ontologically, in its own way—the divine presence.

[24] *Ibid,* pp. 134f.

[25] *Pilgrim's Tale,* p. 77.

[26] *Wounded by Love,* pp. 80, 113.

[27] *Orthodox Church*, p. 137.

Part Three: Prayer and Action

Prayer is the very heart of Orthodox Christianity. This is emphasized by the Optina Elders. "Prayer is food for the soul," writes St. Joseph. "Do not starve the soul." And St. Nikon states even more emphatically: "Do not forget prayer—it is the life of the soul."[28] But doesn't all this emphasis on prayer and spirituality come at the expense of action, of doing good, of love transforming the world? For Orthodoxy, there is the same circularity at play here that we have already seen in other contexts. Good works, in order to be good, must begin with inner transformation, while the latter cannot occur apart from right living. But this circularity, I propose, is easier to grasp than those that are more hidden in the depths of the mystical life. For example, St. Ignatii Brianchaninov writes: "Prayer is the daughter of the fulfillment of the Gospel commandments, and is at the same time the mother of all the virtues." But how can we fulfill the commandments without the virtues, which the former would seem to presuppose? And how can prayer be both mother and daughter at the same time? His answer, here, is instructive. "Prayer produces virtues from the union of the human spirit with the spirit of the Lord. The virtues which produce prayer are different from the virtues that prayer produces: the former are of the *soul*, the latter—of the *spirit*."[29] Thus, the circle is in fact a spiral, leading upward. The goodness that comes out of prayer is of a higher order—more originary, more transformative, more efficacious, more bountiful, than the goodness that makes prayer possible.

Metropolitan Anthony Bloom has put this well, maintaining that if prayer and action are not two sides of the same coin, then the coinage is counterfeit. For a model of the inherent link between prayer and action, he looks to the Wedding at Cana. There, Mary, the Mother of God, approaches Christ in intercession for others, asking for His help. He answers that His "hour"—that is, His glorification, His Kingdom—has not yet arrived. Her answer, in turn, shows complete, boundless, integral faith—"the faith on which the Annunciation was founded"—that her prayer has been heard, despite what seems at best an equivocal answer, for she says to the servants: "Do whatever He tells you." (John 2: 1–11). And the water in the stone pots then comes to life: "The holy Virgin, by this act of faith, established the conditions of the Kingdom and *opened to God the doors of this village wedding*. So it turns out that the hour of the Lord *has* come: it is the hour of the Kingdom, where everything is in harmony with God because man has believed. He blesses the exhausted waters, the useless waters, the waters soiled by washing, and transforms them into the wine of the Kingdom."[30] "This beginning of signs," the Gospel of St. John comments, "manifested His glory." (John, 2:11).

---

[28] Schaefer, Archimandrite George*, Living Without Hypocrisy: Spiritual Counsels of the Holy Elders of Optina* (Holy Trinity Monastery: Jordanville, NY, 2005), pp. 84f.

[29] *Arena*, p. 66. Italics added.

[30] Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *God and Man* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983) p. 101. Italics added.

The Metropolitan interprets: “It is only to the extent to which our physical presence is the presence of God through us, the presence of eternity in time through us, that we remain the Church while remaining engaged in action. If our activity in the world becomes a disengagement in relation to God, we fall back into the condition of a human society which has an ideology but no transcendent reality.” “Action,” Bloom continues, “must be an act of God by our instrumentality. Let us first learn to listen, hear, see and understand God, the world and our neighbor. And then to act not solely according to human wisdom, but above all, primarily on the basis of the divine wisdom which is revealed to us in Scripture, in life and in the sacraments.”[31] There is, then, ultimately a *twofold* sense in which prayer entails the Divine Presence: “We must attain to a prayer of presence, our presence with God and his presence to the world through us.”[32]

[31] Ibid, p. 119.

[32] Ibid, pp. 98f.

Part IV
Byzantine Thought and Modern Culture

If we are to learn from Plato, considering not just his arguments but the modes in which he presents them, we might reasonably conclude that to be a philosopher, one must be something of a mathematician and at the same time, something of a poet. Philosophy cannot dispense with formal rigor, at least as a regulative ideal, while at the same time it cannot leave behind the semantic element, the element of meaning, the richness of language which formal disciplines like mathematics can eschew with impunity. This fourth section embraces these two poles that are often seen as antipodes, i.e. that of art and that of mathematical thought, seeking to show that the visual arts are deeply implicated in the need to seek truth, while at the same time the truths of mathematics are not merely formal exercises, but mediate between the visible and the invisible in just the sense that Plato attributes to the beauty that we commonly associate with the arts when he maintains that in beauty alone, the intelligible and invisible itself becomes visible and manifest. Indeed, in his *Republic*, Plato distinguishes between fantasy (*phantasma*) and image (*eikōn*), with the latter requiring of us a certain double-seeing, by means of which we see the original by means of the image. And of course, this is precisely how geometry makes use of the visible.

Moreover, if all art is originally sacred art, and if sacred art is essentially the vehicle for rendering the invisible visible, then the iconography of the Byzantine East is arguably the supreme example of art. For the icon is most essentially not a representation of sacred realities, but a *presentation* of them within the medium of the visible. And if this is the case, then what is supposed to be sacred art can falsify as well as disclose. Finally, if mathematics is itself inherently *symbolic*, performing the task of the *sym-holon*, that which brings together (*syn*) into a whole (*holon*), then both art and the poetic, as well as mathematics and formal thinking, represent primary sites for incursions between the invisible and the visible which have been momentous beyond the conventional understanding of contemporary culture. Standing in between both art and mathematics, waging unrelenting incursions between creation and the uncreated for the duration of his short life, was the Russian philosopher Pavel Florensky, who figure prominently throughout this section, as he does in other chapters of this book.

Chapter Fourteen Icon and Idol: Representation of the Divine in the Byzantine East

Is Byzantine iconography somehow distinctive, or even unique, in relation to Western art? This chapter considers certain fundamentals of Byzantine iconography, as well as their philosophical and theological presuppositions.

First, we must distinguish between what I shall call sacred art and religious art. Religious art, dominant in the West since the Renaissance, is merely "religious" due to its thematic content, and thus it differs from other kinds of art only through its possession of a religious subject matter, not through the way that it presents that subject matter. Dürer's 1512 copper engraving called "Christ Before Pilate," for example, uses all the same techniques as his earlier 1497 engraving titled "Three Peasants in Conversation." Both are naturalistic, perspectivally accurate, and proportionally correct studies of human beings interacting with one another. Both masterfully embody the new canons of representation evolving in Western Europe at the time, making both of them impressively precise representations of visible reality. Both represent people speaking to one another. Thus, only someone familiar with the respective subject matters would be likely to know that one is religious while the other is secular. Nor would either require the viewer to exhibit any unusual attitude or comportment beyond the respect that is due any other product of human skill and ingenuity. In short, religious art as exemplified here is simply secular art that happens to possess a religious theme.

Let us contrast these two works with the icon of the Holy Trinity by the great Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev, completed somewhat earlier in the fifteenth century. Here we find three angelic figures in a circular configuration, engaged in a mysterious kind of communion with one another, and centered around a low table that supports a small chalice. Each of the figures has a golden aura or halo surrounding the head. The kind of perspective employed by the iconographer is strange to modern eyes, with the lines of perspective reversed from the geometrical order embraced in the West since the Renaissance: rather than disappearing into an infinite vanishing point, they converge instead upon the viewer. In the distance is a tree of sorts, meant to signify the Oak of Mamre, the site of Abraham's homestead, near

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_14

present-day Hebron. Taken as visible forms, they represent the three mysterious visitors hosted by Abraham and Sarah at their home—figures who could have been seen by anyone present—but here the three strangers are themselves "types" of invisible realities: the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, who cannot be seen. Nothing is really "happening" here, yet a certain peace radiates from the icon. It now hangs on a wall in the Moscow's Tretyakov Museum, but in its original (and proper) home—the Trinity-St Sergius Monastery, about an hour's train-ride north from Moscow—it would have been venerated and tenderly kissed by the faithful, who might even engage in a series of prostrations before even approaching the icon itself, as if they we approaching some great and holy mystery. It is sacred art, a visible reality whose purpose is not to represent some other visible reality, nor is it even meant to represent an invisible reality. Its aim is not representational at all, but rather functions to serves as a link, a bridge, an interface, between the visible and the invisible. It seeks to serve as a visible window upon an invisible reality. Or put even more radically, in the manner of Pavel Florensky, whose ideas will be discussed later, it is a doorway through which those invisible realities can themselves approach us, engage us, come to meet us, just as do the lines of reverse perspective that converge on the viewer. The icon is meant to address us, to summon our attention—indeed, to call us into question. In many icons, this is indicated by the face that always faces us, by the eyes that follow us as we assume different perspectives, always radiating out to engage us, no matter where we stand in relation to it. But most importantly, sacred art is contextualized by an ontological premise, however tacit and pre-reflective it may be for the viewer, that I want to maintain constitutes a kind of cultural norm for humanity in most times and places: this is the assumption that the visible in general, and not only sacred art, is the tip of an ontological iceberg, that what one gets is always more than what one sees, that there is an order of invisible reality that is more important that the visible reality we perceive with our senses.

This seems, of course, both suspect and dangerous to Western modernity, this notion of an invisible order. Yet it may be argued that there are dangers inherent to the visible as well. Plato indicates these when in the *Phaedo*, his character Socrates announces that he gave up seeking knowledge in the manner of his predecessors—the *physikoi* or natural philosophers—because he came to fear that by looking directly at visible nature, he would end up like one who becomes blind from looking directly at the sun. That is, the visible taken in itself is potentially blinding, if approached directly. And Socrates adds that just as during an eclipse, when people can more safely watch the sun through the image (in Greek, *eikōn*) it casts, he has likewise decided to investigate beings through words and speeches, *logoi* in Greek, which are themselves images. Yet surprisingly, he insists that the *logoi* are no more images than is visible reality itself. That is, the visible itself is an image of the invisible, thereby suggesting that visibility *as such* can blind us to the invisible.

Meanwhile, the German poet Rilke warns of an opposite danger, one that accrues specifically to images. In his *Book of Hours*, written during the first decade of the

twentieth century, Rilke directs a prayer of sorts to the invisible reality whom he invokes as “You, neighbor God” *(Du, Nachbar Gott)*:

> Between us there is only a narrow wall
> and by sheer chance; for it would take
> merely a call from your lips or from mine
> to break it down, and that without a sound.
> The wall is builded of your images (*Bildern*).[1]

Thus, images too can block the vision, erect a wall or even barricade, causing a different blindness—a blindness inhering not only in the organ of sight, but in a barrier blocking its ability to see. The contemporary French philosopher Jean Luc Marion calls such images idols, images that serve not as *iconic windows*, but as *idolatrous mirrors*, casting back to us merely ourselves. And just as visible reality can be iconic, let me suggest that it can also be idolatrous, mirroring back to us our own faces. And perhaps too, the fear of the invisible, the attachment to the visible that characterizes modernity, is itself a kind of idolatry, as we become increasingly enchanted with our own features, with the reflected images of our own willing and desiring? Perhaps it is not possible to avoid images, to become fundamentalists of the senses as positivism exhorts, true believers in the visible, without getting caught up unawares in yet another kind of imaging? And perhaps, too, risking one kind of blindness or another.

But do we not live in a post-modern era, one that has disavowed representational epistemologies altogether, i.e. has given up the expectation that knowledge can be what Richard Rorty called a “mirror of reality”? Examples are abundant, from the Wittgensteinian notion of language games to non-representational art to Heisenberg’s insight that science no longer offers an *Anschauung* or intuition of the essence of things. Remarkably, this puts us in alliance with ancient Byzantine thought, at least with regard to the first of three principles that I would like to outline as prerequisites to understanding the iconography of the Eastern Church. This *first* principle is that the essence of things is unknowable. And above all, we can never know, nor even glimpse, the essence or substance or being (*ousia*) of God. Yet knowledge is not rendered impossible here, but rather enabled by the great distinction upon which both Byzantine philosophy and theology rest: between essence or substance (*ousia*) and energies or activities (*energeia*). Thus, although the essence of God is forever mysterious—unapproachable and unknowable, even to the highest angelic orders—the divine energies, the activity or actuality of the deity, surround us everywhere, and thus are preeminently knowable, given the right prerequisites. Knowable in the natural order, not by means of concepts, but as one knows a painter such as van Gogh from his paintings. Knowable in the face of the other. And knowable, too, in the icon, because the divine energies are manifest in both. That is, they are discernable in the created order, which everywhere manifests the divine energies, and even more are they imaged in the human countenance, its personal energies exhibiting the divine energies even more overtly. But the iconographer (whose work follows a

[1] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Poems from the Book of Hours,* New York: New Directions, 1941, p. 13.

period of strictly prescribed prayer and fasting) has fashioned the icon to explicitly, thematically, magnificently display the divine energies, to be a window upon them.

Secondly, the energies of God are knowable only relationally, not abstractly or propositionally. Perhaps the greatest philosophical discovery of the Byzantine East during Late Antiquity is its claim that what is really real—i.e. what is hypostatic, what Aristotle called primary substance—is not *ousia* or essence, but what they chose to signify with the Greek word *prosōpon*—literally face or countenance, and hence the act of facing another, of being in relation—which was misleadingly translated by the Latin *persona*, with its connotations of masks and the roles assumed by actors. The icon of Rublev, for example, makes manifest the divine activity, the interrelation of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, united in a relation of absolute love. And reciprocally, the iconographer expects us to enter into this same, intra-trinitarian relation, into the very love that constitutes the divine actuality, as a means of understanding the icon. Self-transcending *erōs* is both the means and the end. Essence, then, whether it is the divine essence or the essence of things and people, becomes actual or actualized (*energeias*) only within relation, only within the personal or face-to-face, only within the kenotic self-transcendence that since Plato has been called *erōs*.

But if higher modes of knowledge can be arrived at only relationally, and if what is known is in fact the relational activity or energies of the knowable, and not its essence, then concepts and categories taken apart from their relational context will necessarily be misleading. We cannot reach the real conceptually, so concepts will always be less true than our abandonment of them, as we jettison abstractions to enter into relation with the other. In technical terms, apophatic propositions—in theology, assertions about what God is not—are truer than kataphatic propositions— assertions about what God *is*. And this is the *third* important premise of Byzantine thought, one that has been largely misunderstood in the Latin West, which has understood this very distinction in propositional terms and called it "negative theology."

Yet for Dionysius the Areopagite, whose *Mystical Theology* has been remarkably influential both East and West, *apophasis* is not about logic and dialectic at all, as Thomas Aquinas and other Medieval Scholastics believed, but about a mystical path of approaching God by means of abandoning thoughts and concepts. Thus, in striving to grasp the divine essence, which cannot be experienced, the West proceeded not mystically and relationally, as did the Greek East, but conceptually and intellectually. And what they called negative theology simply marked the boundaries of that rationalistic approach. Whereas in the East, the divine essence was seen from the very beginning as unknowable and mysterious, except as it is manifest in the divine energies, by means of a relation between knower and known, to which the apophatic approach was a preliminary point of departure. And it is above all the image that stimulates this movement beyond the conceptual. For the image understood as *icon*, rather than as psychological phantasm or artifactual *simulacrum*, refers beyond itself, is "loyal" to its prototype, while it calls or summons or invites us into relation with it. This calling or beckoning (*kaloun*) is precisely what Dionysius understands as beauty *(to kallos)*. That is, beauty (as Plato maintains in

the *Phaedrus*) is the manifestation of the invisible within the visible. And as such, the visible image invites us into a relation with the invisible.

Plato had explored this relation of image and original in the *Republic*, where it is a key theme, in a way that became influential in the Greek East. In his celebrated "divided line" analogy, Plato proceeds from image to original, starting with natural images (*eikōnes* in Greek). The Greek *eikōn* here must be distinguished from the *phantasma*, which like its English equivalent "fantasy," implies something conjured up in the mind, a centaur or a unicorn. But unlike the phantasm, the icon (a) exists outside the mind, and more importantly (b) sustains an ontological relation to its original. The natural images, for example, from which Plato proceeds, are things like shadows and reflections in water or other shiny surfaces. To see them properly is to see *through* them to their originals, and thus for example, to see a shadow as a thing in itself—say, as a dark spot on the floor—is in fact to *mis*-perceive it. The shadow or the reflection in water is seen properly only by means of a kind of double-seeing, *eikasia* or imagination in the proper sense, whereby I see through it to the original which cast it, the lack of which led to the peril of Narcissus in the Greek tale, who took the image for a thing in itself. And this iconic seeing, this *seeing–through*, is in fact, the very *modus operandi* for Plato's epistemology: just as the shadow is an image of the visible thing, so too is the visible thing an image of an invisible reality. But that is not all. The invisible reality—the *eidos*, the invisible "look"—is itself an image of a yet higher reality, which Plato in different dialogues variously names the Good, the One, and the Same. And this highest unity, it is also argued, is beyond being altogether, and thus beyond knowing in any conceptual way. Yet we are not left hapless here, Plato continues, for the Good is at the same time a begetter of images, just as is the author Plato, in his attempt to portray the good through a movement from image to original. And in the work of Byzantine philosophers and theologians such as Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor, it may be argued, both the epistemology and metaphysics of Plato reach their highest fruition in the vision of a world where relation replaces substance, and where the movement from image to original is what Gregory of Nyassa called a movement from one mode of divine beauty (*doxa*, or glory) to another. Moreover, it is a movement not of thought, but of *erōs*.

In the twentieth century, this iconic understanding of knowledge and representation has been philosophically explored by two important figures: the Russian philosopher Pavel Florensky, and the Greek philosopher and theologian Christos Yannaras. And a brief consideration of these two thinkers will lead us toward certain provisional conclusions.

Often compared to Leonardo, Pascal, and Leibniz, Pavel Florensky was one of Europe's greatest polymaths. A brilliant mathematician, physicist, engineer, and inventor—whose scientific discoveries lent him a temporary reprieve from the inevitable exile to the *gulags* for more than a decade—he was at the same time a distinguished linguist (who knew more than a dozen languages), art historian, and theologian, who is also likely to emerge as Russia's most important philosopher. He was murdered by the KGB in 1937, and buried in an unmarked mass grave. But between 1917 and his imprisonment in 1933, he worked passionately, and with

some success, to save the great legacy of sacred art in Russia from a program of systematic desecration and destruction by the Soviet state. The most important literary outcome of this effort was his unpublished book, *Iconostasis*, which concerned not just iconography in general, but especially the ontological function of the icon-screen or iconostasis that is a central feature to this day in every Orthodox Church, standing between the altar and the remainder of the temple, serving functionally as a frame for icons of Christ and the saints of the Church, while serving liturgically as a "boundary between the visible and invisible worlds."[2]

To those unfamiliar with Orthodox liturgies, the iconostasis at first seems like a barrier or divider, perhaps in Rilke's sense of a wall between ourselves and God. But for Florensky, the iconostasis functions in just the opposite way from a partition. Rather, it holds up a series of openings or apertures—the icons themselves—along with the royal doors through which the Eucharistic mysteries enter the nave, each of which serves as a portal between the visible and the invisible. That is, he argues that we live out our lives, for the most part, separated from holy realities as if by a wall, as Rilke had suggested. The icon screen does indeed signify that wall, but only in order to offer us iconic apertures, windows that open out upon invisible realities, rendering it an interface and threshold between heaven and earth, and thereby presenting visually what is in fact the central drama enacted by every Orthodox liturgy: the interaction, and ultimately the *perichōrēsis* or interpenetration of heaven and earth. Thus, the liturgy is not just *mimetic* or representational, but *anamnetic*: recalling, presenting, embodying the holy and heavenly in visual form—not propositionally, but dramatically, aesthetically, performatively in the sense of British philosopher J. L. Austin. And every icon serves this function, whether or not it is part of the iconstasis; each icon opens up upon heavenly realities. Thus, if the icons themselves are apertures to the invisible, windows of heaven, the destruction of icons—as was happening all over Russia through the vandalisim of Russia's churches and monasteries is the walling up of these windows, the imprisonment of humanity in a world that has now itself become a gulag, both prison and place of exile.

But for Florensky, this had already happened philosophically, by means of the same Western worldview that had imported communism into the East. For is this imprisonment and exile not, he argued, precisely the necessary outcome of Kant's wall of separation between phenomena and noumena, between appearance and true being, between the two sides of the iconostasis? Of course, this Kantian thought does not emerge from nowhere; as Nietzsche too had emphasized, Western philosophy as a series on variations on Platonism had already subverted and devalued the visible and earthly, making them "mere appearance," semblances of a true world that was inaccessible to the senses. Long before Kant, the spires of Gothic cathedrals all over Western Europe had long ago begun to point away from the earth toward a heaven that could only be grasped conceptually—in the mind rather than in our living encounter—in marked contrast to the Byzantine dome which served to

---

[2] Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, tr. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), p. 62.

bring heaven down to earth, to merge heaven and earth visually, aesthetically, liturgically, and above all *symbolically*. The symbol, then, is for Florensky the element of all genuine art, the bringing-together (*syn*) into an integral unity (*holon*) of the visible and invisible. And this is to say that for Florensky, all genuine art is at the same time symbolic art and (whatever its explicit thematic content) sacred art.

Christos Yannaras is arguably the most important, and certainly the most prolific, Greek philosopher living today, authoring more than 40 books. Completing graduate studies in patristic theology in Greece as well as at Bonn and Paris, his thought brings together insights from ancient patristic thought with phenomenological and post-modern sources, focusing upon the ontological and epistemological priority of relation over substance, and arriving at certain conclusions already summarized earlier in this chapter. But two of his themes are important to note here. First, Yannaras makes central the role of *erōs* in the disclosure of truth, which along with Heidegger, he understands as *a-lētheia*, un-concealment or un-hiddeness. But for Yannaras, this is not an impersonal event as it is for Heidegger; the happening of unconcealment presupposes *erōs* and self-transcendence, an exodus from the bounded individuality that stands as a perennial temptation for humanity, but within which modernity has enclosed itself. This erotic self-transcendence is itself, he argues, evoked by the phenomenon of the call or invitation (*klesē*)—not just the invitation issuing from the face of the Other, as Levinas would have it, but the call elicited by the face of the world in general.

For it is above all beauty, and the astonishment or wonder that it provokes, that issues the call, and the authentic beauty of the world summons us everywhere, calling us as image (again, *eikōn* in Greek) of invisible realities. In the human face, this occurs through what Florensky calls the "countenance," the inner life that animates the face, manifesting the irreducible difference of the other. And in the natural world, Yannaras argues, cosmic beauty manifests aesthetically the *logos* from which it issues—not as the modern design argument would have it, as the effect of a cause, but as a sculpture of painting reveals the artist, even as it makes evident the spatial absence of the artist. We say, for example, yes! that is a van Gogh—or, of course! that is Cezanne—recognizing the countenance of the artist within the work of art. All creation, then, for Yannaras serves as an icon of the creator, whom it reveals or makes manifest, even as it allows for the distance and indeed hiddenness of the artist. Thus, the icon for both Florensky and Yannaras, is ontologically contiguous with its prototype, and this is in turn possible because of the universal ontological rootedness of the visible in the visible.

But a final point from Yannaras is essential. For Yannaras, as for Plato, the icon must be sharply distinguished from the phantasm (Greek, *phantasma*). While the icon or image elicits *erōs* and self-transcendence, the phantasm works in the opposite direction, projecting its own simulacrum to reflect the object of its own desire (*epithymia*) and willing. But recent philosophers, such as Deleuze, have conflated *erōs* with desire, valorized self-enclosure (what Deleuze calls "the body without organs"), and overtly substituted the simulacrum for the image. This is hardly accidental or idiosyncratic, but constitutes a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Western separation between being and appearing, and its modern legacy of a dichotomy between

objective and subjective spheres. As Marion has observed, from a somewhat different perspective, we are faced with a choice between icon and idol.

It is not the least of Yannaras' contributions, then, to point to the need for *askēsis*, renunciation of desire, as the prerequisite for *erōs*, and thus too for the rediscovery of the image as iconic. Beyond this, he argues, it is also possible to retrieve the iconological dimension of language as well, which reveals and makes manifest, while simultaneously allowing for concealment and withdrawal—unlike the insistence upon total presence, and unhindered availability to desire and consumption, that are entailed by metaphysical, representational understandings of language. Iconological language, exemplified above all in poetry, allows what is spoken its own element of hiddenness, the harboring of its essential integrity even in the midst of the revealing of its energies—not by means of conceptual mastery, but through the dynamics of personal relation. And within this possibility lies, perhaps, the greatest significance of the icon for us today, not just within an understanding of Byzantine art, but as a general ontology.

Chapter Fifteen Heresy and Iconography: Notes on Carolingian Aesthetics and Its Western Successors

On the Problem of Heretical Art

The concept of heretical art may seem peculiar, if not altogether misguided. For isn't *all* genuine art creative and original, revolutionary, unconventional, *unorthodox*? And isn't the heretical defined precisely in contrast with what is orthodox, i.e. as something contesting it? The orthodox, for its part, is thought to be what is conventional, what is merely assumed and taken for granted. The task of art would thus be precisely to call into question the *status quo*, to overthrow comfortable conventions and orthodoxies—to be, in fact, essentially heretical.

Ironically, it is conventional wisdom today that art has been commissioned to be subversive of convention or, in the lexicon of post-modernism, "transgressive." It is for this reason that artists have come to believe they must reinvent themselves periodically, even within a single career, in order to stay current and to keep their work from growing stale and conventional. Thus, the heretical in general must be understood— at least within modernity, i.e. within life as it is lived according to the latest *modus*, life that is always up to date and modern—as simply the predictable emergence of the ever new and always progressive, something that is resisted only by reactionaries and nostalgic defenders of what is old-fashioned and out of date. Why, then, would "heretical art," i.e. art that is merely being true to its own nature, be notable or even noticeable, let alone problematic? Such views, of course, would have seemed quite strange not only to Plato, whose *Republic* understands novelty or innovation as an essential threat to the city, but to the great majority of serious thinkers prior to modernity. But doubtless these objections to any concept of heretical art certainly do reflect attitudes prevailing in society today.

Questioned more radically, however, this modern perspective itself becomes dubious. For the social realm—the "world," or in the New Testament metonym, the *kosmos*—the very sphere within which this valorizing of novelty prevails, is by definition the conventional, the worldly, the realm of what is normal and taken for

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_15

granted, and the innovation that it seeks and encourages is similarly routine and invariably trivial, departing from convention in purely conventional ways. In contrast, fundamental truth—radical truth that gets to the root, truth that matters—is disruptive to society and to the expected modes of novelty and progress, for it appears to be strange and paradoxical and incommensurable—not new as prescribed by the usual norms, but rather incomprehensible to conventional frames of reference, perhaps even as merely odd, or even as nothing new at all.

So begins the narrative in Plato's *Republic*, when Socrates is lured to linger after dark in the Port of Piraeus to see a new kind of horse race with torches lighting up the darkness, a novelty from which he must divert interest if he is to show his friends something truly radical about light and darkness, a lesson about emerging from caves, about ascending from the visible to the invisible. And so it was with what Christians believe was the advent of Truth in the Person of Jesus Christ—"the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world [*ton kosmon*]," the Lord of time and space —whose gentle birth in the darkness of a cave on the edge of the Judean desert, went unnoticed by ancient society, as it pursued the latest novelties of taste and fashion—even if it did not yet (as would the modern world) define itself by this endless pursuit. "The world knew him not." (John I: 9, 10) And when it could no longer choose to ignore this great Paradox— this "strange and wonderful mystery" of God become incarnate, of a person with both divine and human natures—it sought to make sense of it, to make it comprehensible.[1] That is, it yielded to the very sensible, eminently reasonable need to choose one side of the paradox, one horn of the dilemma: to clear up the mystery!

Jesus was really just a man, even if a very great prophet. Or Jesus was really just God, although disguised in the form of a human being, as the Greek gods were often said to do. This choosing of *one side* of the paradox—this denial that the eternal Truth could have really irrupted into this ever-changing, always novel world, without loss of identity—was, like all other choices, called in Greek *hairesis*, a choice of one side over the other. And so the great Christological heresies unfolded one after another, each outdoing the other for its creativity and inventiveness, all rather artistic, in attempting to cover over the radical nature of what had happened, the shocking and scandalous and impossible character of what God has done. Hence, if what traditional Christians believe is true, then this radical emergence of the Truth—radical in the sense of taking place at the very "root" or *radix* of the real itself—was, and is ever and again, rendered sensible, tractable, conventional, and ultimately impotent by the *heretical* choices that reduces it to what has already been assimilated beforehand.[2] Far from being radical, as it assumes itself to be, heresy would thereby

[1] "I behold a strange and wonderful mystery: the cave a heaven, the Virgin a cherubic throne, and the manger a noble place in which hath lain Christ the uncontained God." Ninth Ode of the First Canon, Christmas Matins, *Divine Services and Prayers of the Catholic Orthodox Church*, ed. Seraphim Nassar, Englewood, NJ: Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, 1993, p. 406.

[2] Initially, this heretical choice *(hairesis)* was constituted in collective units or sects, *haireses*. By the time of modernity, and only partly due to the Protestant Reformation, the prerogative of the individual to make sense of things for himself has become a universal feature of society as such.

constitute the very epitome of what is shallow and customary and conventional. That is, if what is radical turns out to be the very opposite of what is novel, then by that fact the novel and heretical and transgressive are not what they believes themselves to be at all, for they embody the very opposite of their aspirations.

Moreover, if art were to convey this paradoxical truth of the Incarnation, would it not itself need to be somehow paradoxical too? Would it not have to somehow connect the immanent and the transcendent, to provide some kind of bridge between the eternal and the temporal, between heaven and earth, i.e. would it not have to be in the strict sense *sacred art*? But this would be possible only if the Paradox had already taken place, if the earthly and temporal had already been infused beforehand with the divine energies themselves, even if this were only rarely glimpsed in the busyness of life. Authentic art, then, is art that would seek to disclose this highest truth, this interpenetration of the earthly and temporal with the divine energies of the eternal God. And conversely, bad or false art—art that falsifies—would efface this ontological contiguity between the visible and the invisible, cover it over—that is, that would succumb to the temptation to *choose* either the heavenly or the earthly, the eternal or the temporal for its locus. That is, it would be *heretical*.

On Kitsch and Sacred Art

It may, perhaps, be helpful to examine an example of how it is possible for art to falsify through its one-dimensionality, i.e. through its flinching before the paradox, its refusal or inability to embrace it. Oxford philosopher Roger Scruton has written several fine articles on the modern phenomenon of "kitsch," both of them showing that kitsch is not merely art that happens to be in bad taste, nor is it even pseudo-art that as such gradually threatens to displace the real thing, like noxious weeds in a fragile flower bed. Rather, kitsch is essentially *Ersatz* religion—a cheap, sentimental substitute for genuine religious perception and sensibility, one that defrauds the would-be believer of an authentic relation to the divine by offering the counterfeit of religious sentiments at a heavy discount, as if meaningful relations with the transcendent could be had without cost or sacrifice. Given the decline of religious faith, and the failure of romanticism as a substitute for it, "what makes for kitsch," Scruton argues, "is the attempt to appear sublime without the effort of being so, …. the attempt to have the life of the spirit on the cheap."[3] Perhaps most unsettling, notes Scruton, who serves as a member of the Advisory Board of the Catholic Education Resource Center, is that religion in the West itself no longer appears to offer an

As noted by sociologist Peter Berger: "the modern individual is faced not just with the opportunity but with the necessity to make choices as to his beliefs. This fact constitutes the heretical imperative in the contemporary situation." Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1979. pp. 30f.

[3] Roger Scruton, "Kitsch and the Modern Predicament," *City Journal*, Winter, 1999. See also Roger Scruton, *Beauty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 188–194.

escape from the shallow and stagnant waters of kitsch and fake emotion. Tellingly, "the earliest manifestations of kitsch are in religion [such as] the plaster saints and doe-eyed madonnas that sprang up during the nineteenth century in every Italian church," even as "mass-produced votive figures flooded ordinary households, the precursors of today's garden gnomes." Soon enough, in the following century, "the 'modernization' of the Roman Catholic Mass and the Anglican prayer book were really a 'kitschification': and attempts at liturgical art are now poxed all over with the same disease." Thus, he concludes, "it is impossible to flee from kitsch by taking refuge in religion, when religion itself is kitsch."[4] And may we not reasonably ask whether false, heretical art has been a consequence from false, heretical religion?

Scruton's insights here into heretical art are powerful, but he nevertheless stops short of fully comprehending the etiology of kitsch, i.e. of seeing how the infusion of sacred aesthetics with trite sentimentality that began some two centuries ago was already being prepared much earlier. For the rise of kitsch itself presupposes the gradual displacement of sacred art in the West by the rise of the same "religious art" that had been the pride of the Renaissance—an aesthetic development that Scruton himself celebrates, and yet that already stands in a fundamentally heretical relation to the shared religious experience of humanity. If sacred art is art that evokes (and indeed invokes) the numinous or transcendent, that puts the viewer into contact with the sacred, religious art is essentially secular art, pictorial art using the same techniques and evoking the same modes of perception as other modes of representative art, but employing them to depict events that happen to have a "religious" character. It is Dürer's woodcut of "Christ Before Caiaphas," done with the same masterful techniques that he employed in his wonderfully detailed watercolor of "Two Squirrels," just as charming, and just as little drawing us into any kind of sacred space, but rather both delighting us as appreciators of his art. Religious art in this sense is secular art that merely happens to portray a "religious" subject matter. While sacred art— the Navajo sand painting as much as the Tibetan mandala—is always in some important sense *itself* a *manifestation* of the holy, religious art is merely a *representation* of some *other* manifestation external to itself, and thus it serves as not as a window, but as a barrier behind and beyond which the transcendent itself remains concealed. And while sacred art in general seeks to present or evoke some sense of the transcendent, rather than merely representing or depicting it, the art of traditional Christianity goes far beyond modes of sacred art in other cultures, boldly drawing upon the ontological and soteriological implications of the Incarnation, through its transfiguration of the material world as such, drawing together the visible and invisible, heaven and earth, into an epiphany that is without parallel in world religions.

Thus, to substitute for this aesthetic interpenetration of the visible with the energies of the invisible an imaginary, merely pictorial representation of empirical events is to obscure the very reality that is supposed to be depicted; it is to open up a chasm between earth and heaven within what is supposed to be the very locus of their embrace and reunion—to interpose a gap between the visible and invisible that

[4] Ibid; *Beauty*, p. 190.

is fundamentally heretical not only in relation to the canons of sacred art, but most specifically in relation to the central role of Incarnational theology within the Christian tradition. It is to *choose* the earthly over the heavenly, rather than drawing them together. And if this has in fact been the case, then it cannot be surprising that within the darkness cast by the eclipse of the holy within Christian art—and within Western Christian spirituality, as was already noted a century ago by the German theologian Rudolf Otto—the rank undergrowth of counterfeit spirituality has begun to take root and eventually predominate. But how does the gap arise that allows a merely religious art—which after all has never been absent as a decorative element within any religious aesthetic—to displace authentically sacred art?

NICEA II

Let us posit, at first in thought alone, a seamless unity, whole and complete. (In reality, traditional Christians believe that this perfect unity characterizes the Faith that Christ delivered to the Apostles, and that we are in turn charged with preserving.) And from this merely posited wholeness—from this *objectum* in the old, scholastic meaning of the term—let us further posit something taken away, something removed and severed from the original unity, appropriated by some external agency. The result will be a hiatus, a lacuna, a rift in at least a twofold sense. First, regarded internally, this act will have violated the integrity of the originally unitary reality, leaving a rift within it, making it imperfect, incomplete. Second, this alien appropriation will set into play an extrinsic, contravening breach, a gap of dissonance and indeed violence, between the appropriator, who takes away—who *takes* something *in his own way*—and that from which the sundered aspect has been taken, somewhat parallel to the objective state of enmity between a vandal and the object of his crime, as well as a resulting enmity between himself and those for whom the sundered integrity of the original whole was important. But if we turn from this merely posited unity back to the real unity of the Orthodox Catholic Faith, we find that it is not just an abstract wholeness but a saving unity, akin to the unity of a plan of treatment prescribed by a physician. And thus, thirdly, the violator of wholeness would introduce a lack of wholeness into himself as well. With a view to the etymological roots of the English word *health* in what is *hale* and *whole*, this inner disruption of integrity would result in injury or illness to the one who has violated the saving unity by choosing one part to the exclusion of the whole. Such a person might well need to be quarantined to protect those who remain healthy, a procedure that the early Church called "anathema." And of course, if that same person were to set about claiming to cure others by teaching them that severing that specific part from the saving whole produced health rather than infirmity, the need for quarantine would become more urgent, no doubt taking a form similar to that employed today when a physician loses his license to practice medicine due to malpractice.[5]

[5] "Heretics are not able to cure the spiritually sick." John S. Romanides, *Patristic Theology,* tr. Alexios Trader, Thessaloniki: Uncut Mountain Press, 2008, pp. 199f.

In ancient Greek, to take away as ones own—to choose one portion and take it for oneself—is *haireisthai*, from which derives the Latin *heresia* and the Middle English *eresie*. And this derivation points rather well to what at first appears as a dual function of heresy: both as rending the integrity of its *objectum*, and as consequently setting in motion an antipathy between that object and the heretical appropriation itself. But of course, the object against which heresy offends need not be only an *objectum*, something posited or hypothetical, as for instance some posited body of doctrine, a set of propositions and concepts. It can also be, and in fact is, something real and living and organic. Heraclitus had already spoken of a certain kind of *haireisthai* when he noted that although a single, self-same *Logos* is common to all, many act as if they had a private understanding, an understanding all their own, each of them taking the *Logos* in their own way, taking away some part while leaving the rest behind. But beyond this, in the Gospel of St. John, a single, self-same *Logos* is revealed to be the Light that illumines all, the Life Who is the Life of all, the beginning and end, through Whom all things are created, and against Whom the darkness has not prevailed. From such a living, integral Logos, nothing could be added or taken away—nothing could render it incomplete or introduce a gap into it—although the *logoi* elucidating it (inherently tending toward the unity they strive to articulate) could surely be falsely appropriated, distorting its images into a kind of dissonance. On the other hand, the act of private appropriation could, and necessarily must, introduce a certain gap or breach between the false *logoi* and the *Logos* itself, setting itself at least tacitly at odds with the self-sameness of the latter. But what if, as ancient Christianity proclaims, this very Logos is itself inherently kenotic, fundamentally *perichoretic*, emptying itself in order to mingle and merge itself with what is by nature other, what is not intrinsically itself? Then the self-appropriating choosing would be not just a propositional falsification, nor would it merely be that falsification in addition to being an alienation or hostile distancing. It would also be an act of resistance, of rebellion, of setting itself up actively and virulently against the agency of the Logos, which moves ecstatically beyond itself to overcome alienation and enmity, a refusal of the gift. And given the healing, saving, character of the Logos, it would at the same time be a descent into a pathology that stood in need of therapy and cure.

During the first Sunday of Lent, the Orthodox Church celebrates not just the restoration of the icons after the iconoclast heresy, but what it calls "the Triumph of Orthodoxy" that took place by means of this restoration, a restoration not just of a mode of art but of the very image of Christ Himself. And the *kontakion* for this feast bears upon our considerations: "No one could describe the Word of the Father; /but when He took flesh from you, O Theotokos, He accepted to be described, /and *restored the fallen image to its former beauty.* /We confess and proclaim our salvation in word *and images*."[6] Not just through the inspired wisdom of the eighth century Ecumenical Council, but before this through the Incarnation itself, the Logos

[6] Orthodox Church in America web page for the First Sunday in Great Lent: https://oca.org/saints/troparia/2018/02/25/10-1st-sunday-of-great-lent-sunday-of-orthodoxy, italics added.

has restored the image or icon to the ancient Beauty from which it had been sundered, bridging the gap between heaven and earth that had been opened by iconoclasm, returning to the earth its sun. The kontakion, and the council, both reflect the theological insights of St John of Damascus, who had argued some 60 years earlier that by uniting Himself with matter, the "fashioner of matter… became matter for my sake, and in matter made his abode"; and thus in this manner God sanctified the material world, made it venerable in a new way.[7] Assuming a correspondingly "deified" human flesh, the Logos had not just joined heaven to earth, but had by that act ennobled matter and the visible as bearers and proclaimers of the Incarnate God—had glorified matter and made possible visible images of the God who has offered the world His own visibility, making the visible world "filled with divine energy and grace."[8]

Not by making the physical world a representation of what cannot be represented, nor through any kind of *mimesis* at all, but by effecting an energized manifestation of that invisible reality itself, i.e. by means of a theophany, the Logos has taken the possibilities of divine imaging beyond the realm of representational truth, where it was never at home, into the realm of ontological interpenetration. Damascene explains that "just as iron plunged in fire does not become fire by nature, but by union and burning and participation, so what is deified does not become God by nature, but by participation."[9] And conversely, citing St Basil the Great, he concludes that "the honor given to the image passes to the archetype" in which it participates.[10] Thus, as the Second Council of Nicea insists a half century later, it is not only permissible to venerate the divine energies in the holy icons, it is incumbent upon the believer not only to venerate the icons, but also to call upon others to join in this veneration as well. For this same ecumenical council goes on to anathemize all "those who do not diligently teach all the Christ-loving people to venerate and salute the venerable and sacred and honourable images of all the Saints who pleased God in their several generations."[11]

This anathema was initially intended for the iconoclasts of the Byzantine East. But it would also fall just as decisively upon the Frankish bishops of Charlemagne's court, who explicitly and indeed vehemently rejected the reinstatement of the icons along with the ecumenical council itself, the latter fact alone setting them outside the integral unity of the Church. And to the same extent that this first great autonomous theological statement of the Western Church regarding religious art, embodied in the so-called *Libri Carolini* and the Council of Frankfurt, was itself a defining manifestation and embodiment of Latin Christendom as such, and especially its mistrust and ultimate rejection of sacred art; to the extent that it constituted a *leitmotif*, a strong current that persisted powerfully in the West, despite Latin claims of

[7] St John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), trans. Andrew Louth, section 1:16.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid, section 1:19.

[10] Ibid, section 1:21.

[11] Philip Schlaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, Volume XIV, p. 534.

its disavowal; to the degree that it was intensified in the iconoclasm of the Reformation, while much more tacitly, but no less effectively, feeding (and being fed by) the Western refusal to acknowledge the divine energies—to this very extent, the anathema would fall upon the Western Church as a whole, anticipating beforehand a robust refusal of the religious kitsch that begins in the nineteenth century throughout the Christian West—and indeed, within those Orthodox areas influenced by its aesthetics. The default from sacred art to religious art, along with the denial of the Eastern theology of divine energies in creation, would thus entail the rise of kitsch as an entirely predictable outcome of having appropriated the imagery of the Church in an idiosyncratic, and thus private and heretical, manner. These hypotheticals, then, need to be critically examined.

Iconoclasms East and West

The iconoclastic movements in the Byzantine East and the Latin West differed from one another in important ways. Perhaps most evident is the fact that Eastern iconoclasm was overt and manifest, while the iconoclasm of the West more often insisted, at least until the time of the Reformation, that it was not an iconoclasm at all, even in its early antecedent in the *Libri Carolini*, where the veneration of icons was subjected to every conceivable form of polemical deprecation and ridicule, not excluding terms such as: "absurd, childish, delirious, demented, depraved, fatuous, imprudent, incautious, laughable, mindless, obtuse, perverse, pointless, rash, reprehensible, ridiculous, risible, silly, stupid, supercilious, and useless."[12] Such invectives, it should be noted, are employed against the practices of the already ancient Byzantine empire by a theologian named Theodulf, who was himself otherwise occupied with reminding his newly-converted Frankish compatriots that it was not really proper to store their harvested crops inside the temple sanctuaries.[13]

But for the Franks, with their concerns about storing pumpkins and hay, as for their earlier Latin predecessors, concerned with more complex practicalities of building bridges and aqueducts, it seemed preposterous indeed that mere images could be held in some kind of special esteem—ludicrous, and thus explicable only by recourse to some kind of idolatrous perversity of their Eastern counterparts. For had not one of the West's greatest theological minds, no less than Pope Gregory the Great, written that images were of use only to the illiterate, i.e. only for the instruction of those who could not read books for themselves, while emphasizing that what he called venerating (*adorantes*) the images was not to be allowed?[14] Thus, during

[12] Thomas F.X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 181.

[13] Paul Edward Durron (ed.), *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, University of Toronto Press, 2004.

[14] Noble, p. 42: "Pictures are used in churches so that those who do not know letters may at least read by seeing on the walls what they cannot read in books."

this last decade of the eighth century, the theologians of the Frankish court had no difficulty in rejecting a conciliar statement—even if it was nominally endorsed by their own Roman Pope, in formal unity with the other reigning patriarchs and bishops—prescribing the veneration of icons, and embraced instead what they saw as their own, moderate position, their self-styled *via media*, i.e. their contention that religious images were permissible, but only for the purposes of *decoration* and *instruction*, and never for genuine veneration (*proskyesis*) which they confused with worship of adoration (*latreia*). Thus, as will be argued, by taking the teaching of the Church in their own manner, they set themselves and the course of the Western Church as a whole, in a position of heretical enmity not only against the Ecumenical Council, but against the divine energies themselves, effectively inaugurating a gap between heaven and earth that would one day be filled with noxious religious representations that were neither venerable nor instructional—nor even very decorative—or else private devotional fantasies that were themselves subject not to veneration, but (idolatrously) to adoration. As argued by Thomas Noble, author of the most exhaustive study of the Libri Carolini and himself overtly sympathetic to Theodulf's efforts: "That Theodulf differed from numerous late antique writers and also from his Byzantine contemporaries on the ontology of images derives from a fundamental point in his theology. *Images were purely material and God was purely spiritual*.... Images simply were not holy, *did not participate in holiness*."[15] That infusion of matter with the divine energies that underlies the very concept of the icon and of sacred art as such—that underlies the whole of Byzantine metaphysics and cosmology as well as aesthetics, always echoing and reverberating the Great Event of the Incarnation—all this was simply alien to the Frankish mind, leading to its rejection of the icon and the great Paradox of heaven and earth drawn together which had made it possible.

In the East, by contrast, iconoclasm went against the grain—was in fact what Peter Brown has argued was a kind of loss of nerve. The Church in the East had ridden something of a rising tide since the fourth century, with its wealth and fortunes waxing. And gradually, at the head of royal processions and in the forefront of major battles; at the entryways, and over the apses of its splendid churches; and in the prayer corners of its ordinary citizens, hung holy icons, images that were increasingly felt to offer the protection and providence and comfort of the divine energies with which they were infused. At the same time, the understanding of the divine energies, in contrast to the divine essence, was being better understood by the empire's great theologians (not the least of them St John of Damascus) to be an indispensible means of understanding and experiencing the agency of God within the world, the holy activity of the Logos who Himself became flesh and visible matter, irrevocably joining the world to Himself, the holy icons serving as a preeminent example.

Yet at the crest of this triumphant surge, disaster struck twice, first in the form of the Islamic invasions of the eighth century from the south, and then again in the north during the ninth century with the victorious armies of Bulgarians. Both

---

[15] Ibid, p. 223, italics added.

suggested that the confidence in divine energies and in the divine grace that were manifest in the icons, the very reliance upon their protection, may have been an over-reaching, perhaps even a kind of *hubris*. Was it merely accidental that extreme iconoclasts, the Muslims, had overwhelmed the icon-venerating Byzantines? Was there not a lesson to be learned? And doubtless, there was indeed a certain element of magic and superstition and arrogance involved in the cult of icons that needed to be purified, thereby restoring them as occasions for mystical contemplation, back away from vulgar expectations accruing to a mere talisman or high-grade lucky charm. But at the same time, it is important to see that what was at issue in the iconoclasm of the East was never whether religious imagery could be instructive or decorative or otherwise helpful. The real issue concerned the inner character of the icons, the power or energy that inhered within them, and whether this could be a legitimate object of veneration—a globally negative answer to which constituted the very essence of iconoclasm, not a simple prohibition of religious imagery. And when the borders of the empire were once again secure, what the Orthodox celebrate at the beginning of Lent as the Triumph of Orthodoxy could finally, once and for all, be consolidated as a re-affirmation of the divine energies upon which the character of authentically Incarnational spirituality and theology necessarily rests. Nor is it surprising that the Latin West, with its imperfect understanding, and eventual rejection, of the distinction of essence and energies, of *ousia* and *energeia*, never truly grasped what had been at issue in the East. From the viewpoint of the naïve proto-nominalism that served as their *de facto* metaphysics, the Franks could only see the veneration of icons as the curious, decadent practice of an overripe civilization.

The Persistence of Western Iconoclasm and Its Heretical Implications

Eventually, of course, in the fifteenth century, the Byzantine empire did in fact fall to the Muslim invaders who had been menacing them for the better part of a 1000 years—conquerors whose unrelenting iconoclasm had served as an inspiration for the first iconoclasts of the Byzantine East, and who immediately set about destroying and disfiguring the iconography of these newly mastered lands. And yet still there can be encountered surviving examples of Byzantine temples whose iconography is fully intact—on Mt. Athos, for example, or atop the high rock pinnacles of Meteora in Thessaly or in nearby Hossios Loukas, or in Constantinople's Chora Church, whose walls bear perhaps the greatest collection of sacred art remaining on earth. Here one can still be surrounded by icons covering every surface save the flooring itself, with no white walls or ceiling space left that has not been inscribed with this powerful imagery. Remarkably, the experience is never that of claustrophobia or overstimulation, nor does one ever feel the anonymous sense of being immersed in a crowd. Rather, one feels the tenderness of being cradled within an

embrace—the loving embrace of "a cloud of witnesses." One may contrast this with the experience of being in an eighteenth century Rococo church—say the small Wieskirche, or perhaps better the Ottobeuren Basilica, both in Southern Bavaria—whose ornate and corpulent two and three dimensional figures (already crowding the aesthetic borders of kitsch) cover a far lesser proportion of the surface area, yet which present themselves as so much more crowded and overwhelmed by imagery that the thought of one more figure being added to this swarm of images induces something akin to panic.

In the language of Jean-Luc Marion, himself perhaps the most important Catholic philosopher and theologian working today, this can be seen as a contrast between icon and idol, between images that serves as windows of transcendence, and those that serve as mirrors of immanence, reflecting back to the viewer the visage with which the image is faced. And it was perhaps with a retrospective shudder against such an oppressive horde of florid imagery that the Second Vatican Council of the Latin Church warned that although "the practice of placing sacred images in churches so that they may be venerated by the faithful is to be maintained [yet] nevertheless their number should be moderate and their relative positions should reflect right order. For otherwise they may create confusion among the Christian people and foster devotion of doubtful orthodoxy." But this, in turn, raises the question of why it would be so unthinkable to suggest moderation within the wall-to-wall imagery of the Hossios Loukas or Varlaam Monastery *katholikon* temples, both iconographies written in medieval Greece, where no vertical surface lies bare of iconic covering. If icons are vehicles of light and transcendence, why would some higher ecclesiastical authority need to prescribe boundary and moderation? How could it be maintained that a genuine icon could ever pose this kind of threat, unless through ignorance of the icon and the spirituality that it presupposes?

Since the time of the Council of Frankfurt, the Roman Church has maintained that it has upheld the Second Nicene Council that restored the icons. But in those rare instances that the icon is claimed to have been affirmed since the eighth century by the Latin West, this has always been embedded within a matrix of qualifications: that the images are to serve only for edification and instruction, that they be done with moderation, that they be subjected to the approval of the church hierarchy, etc. Nor is the genuine veneration (*proskynesis*) of icons itself ever seriously affirmed amidst these cautions and caveats, but on the contrary is conflated either with *latreia* or worship (which, of course, is prohibited), or reduced to mere commemoration and remembrance, and ultimately legitimized as a *stimulant to the imagination*, which the West has commended, a practice that as we will soon examine, is severely criticized in the Orthodox East. As both Brown and Noble make clear, the controversy over icons in the East was never about religious representation per se, but about the powers or energies that could be attributed to certain images and the actions that could constitute an appropriate response to those expectations. But this was never really grasped in the West, either in the eighth century or in the twenty-first, since the theological distinction between essence and energies was never understood, usually being rejected out of hand.

This can be seen most clearly in the fourteenth century debate between St Gregory Palamas and the Calabrian monk Barlaam, and in the respective views of the Orthodox and Catholic intellectual communities regarding its outcome. At least since the time of Augustine, the West has attempted to grasp the divine essence in a primarily conceptual and rationalistic manner, while rejecting any robust sense of the divine energies as manifest in the world, i.e. it has not just assumed but insisted upon that gap or breach between heaven and earth that the art and theology and spirituality of Orthodoxy has striven to overcome. Lacking this sense of the divine energies at play within the world, it is not surprising that what we might call, with deference to Derrida, a kind of logocentrism has been embraced in the West. Theodulf, for example, in his advice to priests emphasizes above all that they must always remember to bring books with them in their travels, for indeed in the West it is in books and arguments and disputations that the truth is to be encountered—seeking the Logos as understood in a narrow and literalistic way as bound up exclusively with words and language, rather than manifest throughout creation, a view that is taken to its ultimate conclusion by the French Calvinist philosopher Jacques Ellul, who sees words in the literal sense as the only non-idolatrous medium for revelation.[16] And ironically, it is precisely by grasping the aesthetics of images through this filter that this putative concern over avoiding idolatry in the church encourages a kind of art that—judged by the criteria of one of the most insightful philosophers of the Latin West, i.e. Jean-Luc Marion—is itself deeply and profoundly idolatrous.

In contrast to this metaphysical and aesthetic closure is the world that is set to work by the icon, not in order to replace or efface the spoken or written word, but to reveal the Logos as inscribed everywhere, not only on iconostasis and the walls of the Temple, but throughout the cosmos. In Pre-revolutionary Russia, where a visitor venerated the icon before greeting his host, the sacred art of the icon sanctified not only liturgical ritual, but daily life as well. “Orthodox theology was expressed both in individual icons and in the relationships between images, time (the church year) and space (the church interior). In our period the majority of the Russian laity was illiterate, but this does not mean, as is sometimes assumed, that icons were some sort of pictorial teaching aid, which served *faute de mieux* as an alternative to texts. They themselves constituted the texts of Christian doctrine as much as the written word.”[17]

The Greek philosopher Christos Yannaras has noted that the breach between East and West—according to the argument of this paper, a breach that generates a theological gap between heaven and earth—opens up not just in the rejection of the essence/energy distinction in the Latin West, but perhaps just as profoundly in its translation of the Greek *prosōpon* by the Latin *persona*, and its ultimate assimilation to the concept of *substantia*. That is, the great patristic insight that *prosōpon*—

[16] Ellul.

[17] Lindsey, “Art and liturgy in Russia: Rublev and his successors,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Volume Five: Eastern Christianity*, ed. Michael Angold, Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, p. 294.c.

facing and being faced, and thus relationality as such—was both metaphysically and epistemologically prior to essence or *ousia*. Thus, if the *prosōpon* or face is seen as a *persona* or mask, we are compelled to seek the essence behind it. But if being itself has the character of relationality, then the face-to-face encounter with the visage offered by the genuine icon is generative not just of religious epiphany, but of the only appropriate mode of understanding a Trinitarian reality that has revealed itself as a "who" rather than a "what," as relation rather than substance. And to appropriate the face of the icon as entailing anything less is to step into the dark breach of heresy and division in a manner that far exceeds any differences in the parsing of aesthetic distinctions. It is rather, as the Russian philosopher Florensky has argued, the closing up and plastering over of the very windows through which the light itself can enter.[18]

Art and Devotion

But so far, for the sake of exposition, we have been approaching the icon in a somewhat misleading way by considering it as "art," even if we add the qualification that it is "sacred art," as opposed to merely "religious art." For as we understand it today, after a half millennium of secularism in the West, art is now for us something to be viewed, to be seen, to be looked at, at best studied and contemplated. But this has never been the purpose of an icon, for its function has always been primarily ritual. An icon is not made to be looked at, but for the purposes of liturgy and prayer, for devotion. The natural and normal place of an icon is not on a museum wall, nor in the parlor of a great manor or villa, nor even gleaming in glossy color from the pages of an Abrams coffee-table book, but in the prayer corner of an Orthodox home, the center of worship for the family who dwells there. Or on the walls of the temple, perhaps in the narthex, where it will be kissed and prostrations made before the icon as an act of veneration. Adoration is indeed here as well, but it is directed not to a piece of wood, but to the living God whose energies shine through the icon and into whose Presence we prepare to enter more fully as we move past the narthex into the sanctuary. Or at night, before retire, I stand before the icons in the prayer corner of my home, facing East if at all possible, and pray to Christ, to the Mother of God, to my Patron Saint, to my Guardian Angel: "O Angel of Christ, my holy guardian and protector of my soul and body… pray for me, a sinful and unworthy servant, that thou mayest show me forth worthy of the kindness and mercy of the All-holy Trinity and of the Mother of my Lord Jesus Christ, and of all the saints, Amen."

And the icon of the angel draws me out, draws me out and draws me in: draws me ecstatically away from myself as I pray, and draws me into the invisible realm of heavenly inhabitation, the world into which my prayers seek to enter, as I move beyond the world that I shall soon be required to leave behind. Everything in the

[18] Florensky, *Iconostasis*.

icon, from the enigmatic expression of the angel to his reverent gaze into depths I seek to enter myself, draws me not toward the visible world, nor even less into the murky depths of my own passions and thoughts, as would a realistic paining, but toward transcendent spiritual realities.

But what if it is not a genuine icon at all? What, indeed, if I have surrounded myself with "religious" paintings, whether of a kitschy, sentimental timbre that stimulates maudlin emotions and saccharin thoughts, or perhaps instead a high-quality reproduction of some elevated, sophisticated, beautiful work of art, the Sistine Madonna by Raphael, for example? About the Sistine Madonna, the great Orthodox theologian Bulgakov has commented incisively:

> Here is beauty, only wonderful human beauty… but there is no grace here. To pray before this image? It is blasphemous and impossible! [Who would assume such "blasphemous familiarity,"] take such a tone after an apparition of the Mother of God? This is not an icon, it is a painting. A young mother with a wise child is walking with steady human steps upon thick heavy clouds, as if on melting snow. There is no Virginity here, not to mention Ever-Virginity; on the contrary, here reigns its rejection—femininity, woman, sex…[19]

Bulgakov is repulsed at the thought of praying before such an image, thinking that it would be an act of idolatry. For it portrays the "blasphemous familiarity" we easily assume with the empirical and actual, rather than the noetic energy, the mysterious intangibility, the evocative draft of the invisible wafting through the visible toward the spiritual reality of the Mother of God. And in a restrained manner, it is indeed sentimental, stirring our emotions, arousing our passions toward this lovely young mother and her enchanting little child. That is, the kitsch is already present, in a germinal form. Once Raphael's classical mastery of form is withdrawn, this is indeed all that is left behind. But we need to see this kitschish content as more than just tastelessness. For there is more to learn from the Frankish theologian Theodulf. In Noble's analysis of the Libri Carolini, he finds the term *"internis oculis"* used some thirty times by Theodulf to indicate the importance of visualizing "the Lord" through "our mind's eye, our interior vision." For indeed, this is for him the only legitimate reason for retaining images, even when their only purpose is "decoration" and "commemoration." i.e. because "for Theodulf spiritual progress comes only when it is possible to see in the depths of the soul things that are invisible to the naked eye." Put differently, the arousal of this interior vision" is the very point and sole justification of this purely decorative, instructive, commemorative art. But this is best stated by Theodulf himself: "It is obvious that God is to be sought in the heart, not in visible things, and not in manufactured things."[20]

Thus, the Frankish worshipper too stands before an image in prayer, setting the precedent for the Catholic West to this day. Standing before some particular Station of the Cross, before a painting of the Sacred Heart, before a lurid Crucifix startling and shocking us (perhaps even bringing tears to our eyes) with its graphic gore, the goal is always the same one that the Frankish theologian identifies: to evoke through

---

[19] Cited in Sergei Sveshnikov, *Imagine That. … Mental Imagery in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox Private Devotion,* 2009, p. 33.

[20] Noble, pp. 222, 221.

the imagination, in the "interior vision" of the soul, this imaginative vision—to individually produce within oneself, not externally as something manufactured, i.e. made by the hands, the object of adoration and indeed worship, which will be made not by the hands but by the mind. Thus, something remarkable happens here. The individual worshipper becomes the artisan, the imaginative iconographer writing within the soul through fantasies stimulated by the decorative and commemorative paintings in the material world. Unlike the Eastern icon, which is venerated only as a vehicle of the divine energies that are themselves the object of worship, it is now the inner products of pictorial imagination that are adored, the fantasies of Jesus and his Sacred Heart, of His falling upon the cobblestones of Jerusalem under the weight of the cross, only now abiding within the fantasy life of the believer—it is these "interior seeings" that are now worshipped and adored! And it is here, at the level not of theology and doctrine, but at the level of orthopraxis, that we can see the devastating effects of what this essay has called heretical art, i.e. in art that is meant to stimulate inner fantasies that themselves become the manufactured objects of worship, or in plainer terms, that become idols for the worshipper.

Fr Sergei Svishnikov has written a most thought-provoking book, (*Imagine That. . . . : Mental Imagery in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Devotion*) reflecting that within an ecumenical age when what might be held in common as doctrine between the Orthodox and the Latin's is being explored and emphasized, purely conceptual matters typically have little bearing on the faith of individual believers. Meanwhile, is it not possible that what separates East and West most decisively can be found not in doctrine but in practice: that what is most strongly prescribed in one (the visualization of religious images) is most strongly prohibited in the other (the visualization of religious images). *Les orandi, lex credendi*. Citing figures such as St Ignatius of Loyola not as exceptions, but as exemplars of Roman Catholic devotion (as testified by Pope Paul III, who wrote of them that "these exercises are full of piety and holiness, and that they are and will be extremely useful and salutary for the spiritual profit of the faithful") Svishnikov shows the centralithy the production of mental imagery to Catholic devotional life. Rosaries, pictures, exercises, narratives area all designed to stimulate the individual believer to conjure a vivid interior world or fantasy, under the belief that this would enhance and intensify their piety.

And it cannot be overemphasized how greatly such practices would fill any Orthodox spiritual director, any abbot or abbess, any monk who has read even a few pages of the *Philokalia,* with utter horror! From the earliest days of Orthodox asceticism, the instruction has been quite to the contrary, to empty the mind and be ever vigilant of images, fantasies, thoughts, and indeed visions as at best dangerous delusions and at worst demonic temptations. "Imagination," states St Ignatius Brianchaninov, "however alluring and well-appearing it may be, being the willful creation of the mind itself, brings the latter our of the state of Divine truth, and leads the mind into a state of self-praise and deception, and this is why it is rejected in prayer. The mind during prayer must be very carefully kept without any images, [and] if the mind allows them during prayer, will become an impenetrable curtain, a wall between the mind and God." "The most dangerous of the incorrect types of prayer consists of the person [actively] creating imaginary pictures, seemingly bor-

rowing them from the Holy Scripture," he continues, "but in reality—from his own state of fall and self-pride; and with these pictures he flatter his own self-opinion, his fall, his sinfulness, deceives himself." This is entirely consistent in the hesychast tradition, beginning at least in the fourth century when St Macarius of Egypt warns that "Satan appears to those seeking visions as an angel of light to foster in them a proud opinion of themselves as visionaries of the divine, and by this self-pride to lead them to destruction." And in the next century, we find St Nilus of Sinai warning that we must be "deaf and dumb during prayer." "Do not," he instructs, "desire to see any face or image during prayer. Do not desire to see Angels, or Powers, or Christ, in order not to become insane, having accepted a wolf for the shepherd and having worshipped the enemies—demons."[21] No mediation is possible here. What is medicine for the one is poison for the other. At least one of these two modes of worship is not just dangerous, but heretical. And both of them are promoted and enabled by very different understandings of the function of art in spirituality, with one seeking to use the skill of the artist to stimulate passions, fantasies, and visualizations while another seeks, through an ancient spiritual art that requires long periods of prayer, fasting, and other acts of asceticism, to create images that will have the capacity to draw the worshipper into contact not with his own psychological landscape, but with the divine energies at work within the world.

The Angel of the Icon

Nikolai Leskov was one of Russia's greatest story-tellers, weaving together enchanted narratives often shaped by traditional folk tales and an intimate knowledge of the ways of ordinary Russian people. Not uncommonly, his stories portrayed simple, humble characters sometimes rising to acts of great nobility—or uncanny evil. Unjustly neglected today, in the nineteenth century he was compared favorably to his peers Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, while his writing was praised by the likes of Chekov and Gorky.

One of his most remarkable short stories concerns a miracle-working icon. This tale is of particular interest for this essay, since Leskov himself was trained as an iconographer, learning the art of the icon from within, while at the same time pursuing a sustained friendship with the iconographer Nikita Racheiskov, in whose studio "The Sealed Angel" was written. In portraying how the icon is understood and approached by simple Russian peasants, Leskov's story is helpful in allowing us a synoptic, sympathetic, but unsentimental sense of the icon as it has been traditionally experienced in the life of Orthodox Christians over the course of nearly two millennia.

The narrative begins during a howling blizzard on St Basil's Eve, at Christmastide. In a remote, overcrowded inn on the Transvolgan steppe, where many have taken refuge from the storm, a debate has erupted over whether "every saved person is

[21] Sveshnikov, pp. 27ff.

guided by an angel." Most dispute this claim, especially at such an inclement time, but a certain *muzhik* or Russian peasant insists that this belief is indeed a true one, even though "not everybody could behold the angel's path, and you could only get a notion of it from real experience." Upon questioning, he reveals that in fact he has himself been led by an angel, and upon the insistence of what by now is an eager audience, he agrees to tell the story, but only while he kneels: "the story I'm going to tell you is more properly told kneeling down, because it's a highly sacred and even awesome thing."[22]

We notice that the angel is revealed not primarily through looking at his icon, which gets only the briefest description later in the account, but through the revelatory action of the narrative, an epiphany so sacred that the knee must bow before it. The angel of the icon is a presence more than a sight.

The man, Mark Alexandrovich by name, turns out to belong to a group of masons—Old Believers, as it happens, who travel throughout Russia working on major projects that require large teams such as theirs. They are an extraordinary group, not least because of the passion of their leader, Luka Kirilovich, for icons, which has led him to assemble an extraordinary collection of ancient icons, "either real Greek, or of the first Novgorod or Stroganov icon painters," icons that "shone" from "the keenness and fluency of their marvelous artistry." Icons that "aren't painted anywhere, not in Moscow, not in Petersburg, not in Palekh." (52) The Old Believers love these holy icons, maintaining a horse and special cart to transport them, following behind it on their journeys in "the way the Jews followed Moses in their wanderings in the desert." That is, they carried with them their own "tabernacle, holding God's blessing," as they travelled across Russia. And the crown of this collection is the icon of their own guardian angel, who precedes them and leads them as they travel, granting them guidance and success in their work: "This angel was truly something incredible. His face—I can see it now," Mark narrates, "is most brightly divine and so swiftly succoring; his gaze is tender… Wondrous! Wondrous! … You pray, 'Overshadow me,' and you grow all quiet at once, and there's peace in your soul. That's what kind of icon it was."

The Hebrew tabernacle carried the holy of holies. So too does the icon cart that leads the daily procession, but even more immediately, so also do the icons themselves within the cart, which bear the divine energies in an analogous manner to the holy of holies, and call for the same kind of veneration. The blessing of the angel as he leads the workers is ontological, not visual or psychological, for they rarely "look" at him, and never "imagine" him. His guidance is generally unseen, even though his usual locus is upon the face of the icon.

"Everything went beautifully for us, and wondrous was our success in all things: we always found good work, there was concord among us; peaceful news kept coming to us from our folks at home; and for all that we blessed the angel who went

[22] Nikolai Leskov, *The Enchanted Wanderer and Other Stories*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013) trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, pp. 51f.

before us, and it seemed to us it would be harder to part with this most wonderful icon than with our own lives."[23]

But there are even greater blessings to be bestowed upon them by their angel, blessings that could come only through the spiritual growth that comes through suffering and self-sacrifice:

"Through the providence of our [angelic] guide himself, he himself wished to be insulted, in order to grant us the holy ordeal of sorrow, and through it to show us the true path, before which all the paths we had trodden were like a dark and trackless wilderness." And with the audience at the inn now even more eager to hear about this yet higher path upon which the workers were to be led, Mark goes on "to set forth the wondrous wonders that came to us from our angel."

The wonders performed by the guardian angel are not magical, but depend on faith, and this faith must be tested and deepened. Like Christ Himself, the icon angel, and his flock, must be insulted and assaulted, subjected to the darkness of sorrow before new and brighter light can shine forth.

Through a series of misfortunes and betrayals, the group's angel icon is not only confiscated, but sealing wax is contemptuously stamped onto the face of the angel by a spiteful official. The masons are inconsolable, and now disaster upon disaster follows in their work, which is at this time being performed on the great bridge over the Dnieper River at Kyiv. A plan is formed to fashion an identical icon, and secretly substitute it for their own angel, which is being held for safekeeping by the Orthodox Bishop. But who can fashion such an icon today, in a time when iconographers merely "represent the flesh of the earthly, life-loving man, while in sacred Russian icon painting there [was once] portrayed the heavenly type of face, concerning which a material man cannot even have any real notion." Thus, in the icon painting of the time of Leskov's narrative, a low point prevails in Russian iconography, "everywhere a corruption of the senses is developed and the mind is given over to vanity. The model of lofty inspiration is lost, and everything is taken from the earth and breathes of earthly passion." Why, "our newest artists" have even taken to "portraying the warrior-angel Michael as Prince Potemkin of Taurida!"

The workers assume that because the icon angel is blinded by the seal across his face, so too is the angel himself, and so too are those who depend upon his guidance. The Old Believers will find that these assumptions are in fact false. In fact, the real blindness lies in the modern generation of iconographers, who under the influence of Czar Peter the Great and his Westernizing successors, have emulated the "naturalism" of Western art. They make Ersatz icons whose revelatory capacity is blocked, and which do not through their artistry open access to the divine energies—they are no longer sacred art, and this is plain to the simple believers who know the icon from experience as an interface between heaven and earth. Old Russian iconographers were scandalized by Western religious painters

[23] Ibid, p. 53.

using living models for their paintings, which often meant employing prostitutes, who were the only women willing to pose for hire. Nor is Prince Potempkin a better choice. The iconographer does not represent actual individuals, whether prostitutes or princes, but spiritual realities.

Finally, it is confirmed that there remains one iconographer, a man named Sevastion, who can paint (or "write" as it is often said) genuine icons, and Mark sets out to find him. And although he does not know it, he is still being led by the angel, who is far from blinded. Along the way, for example, thinking he has become lost in the forest, he is led to meet a holy hermit who is legendary throughout Russia. Looking at the hermit Pamva, Mark thinks "Ah, how good! Ah, how spiritual! As if an angel were sitting before me and plaiting bast shoes, so as to appear simple to the world." (90) And soon his sense that he is in fact seeing his own angel now manifest in the hermit becomes even more unavoidable, when Pavda advises him concerning the search for a substitute angel: "'The angel is gentle, the angel is meek, he clothes himself in whatever the Lord tells him to; he does whatever is appointed to him. That is the angel! He lives in the human soul, sealed by vain wisdom, but love will shatter the seal…" Mark cannot avert the realization: "What if he himself is the angel, and God orders him to appear to me in another guise?"

In this critical realization, the simple believer discovers that the angel is not "in" the icon in some spatial sense, but only revealed "through" it in the very same sense that he is now revealed, perhaps even more powerfully, through the hermit Pamva, who in turn urges him to keep faithfully seeking, and following, yet additional revelations of his guiding angel.

Finally, Mark finds the iconographer Sevastion, and through a series of clever ruses, he is able to paint a perfect replica of the original angel icon. A replica seal is even fashioned to cover the face of the replica angel. But the only time to make the swap for the original is during a certain church service when the bishop will be preoccupied, and now the River Dnieper is impassible due to a winter tempest. How to cross the River in the dark to make the swap, when there is nothing more than a narrow chain connecting the two sides? Nevertheless, the group leader Luka undertakes an almost certainly suicidal crossing of the wide river during this terrifying storm—much like the one that the listeners at the inn hear outside the walls, as the tale is recounted—all the while protectively carrying the icon as he blindly balances upon the chain. Miraculously, he makes it to the other side, to the wild delight of Maroy, the elderly Old Believer who has been waiting for him, deep in prayer. But Maroy has yet another source of delight, for he has seen something extraordinary, something that no one else has seen. He has beheld a light emanating from the angel icon, shining forth brilliantly to show Luka the way across the treacherous river, even though the icon is itself a replica, and worse yet, one written not by an Old Believer but by a canonically Orthodox iconographer. And upon Luka's safe arrival, another discovery is made; the seal on the replica is now gone, as if the angel has removed it himself, in order to see and show the way across. And at this finding, Luka realizes that the angel, now in the from of the replica, has not only been

leading him across the stormy river, but also leading, one step at a time, his group of schismatic Old Believers back to the true Church! In a state of inspiration, he immediately confesses everything to the Bishop, who now offers him communion, which is soon accepted by the rest of the group as well, when they learn of the great miracle of the Angel who has been guiding them for so long: in the ancient icon they have long venerated; within the "tabernacle" as they are led across the Russian steppe; during that time the angel's face is sealed; in the guise of the hermit Pamva; in the new angel icon which has miraculously unsealed his own countenance; and now into reunion with the Holy Orthodox Church. Nor is the intensity and exuberance of their newly restored faith diminished when the replica seal is found wedged at the bottom of the frame, in a way that might well have happened in the act of being jostled back and forth across the broad Dnieper, for by now the group is fully convinced of the angel's providence. The Old Believers have now been led back to their Orthodox home, while their angel who has been guiding them all along has been restored to them, and will once again faithfully guide them, but in both cases in a far more profound manner than before.

Leskov was a master at capturing the mindset of ordinary Russians because he spent so much time with them, observing and transcribing their beliefs and practices. And in this story, he portrays with great subtlety the simple Russian believer's understanding of the icon which he venerates. The muzhiks in the story are far from being simpletons. They can distinguish iconographic styles from many regions and from all periods, and they can give a most sophisticated account of how the style or art works to draw them toward a spiritual reality. That reality, in this case that of the angel, is never thought to be a piece of wood, or to reside in a piece of wood, even though the wooden icon is venerated precisely because it is that place the angel is most consistently made manifest, rendered visible. But no one imagines that the angel is held captive in the icon like a genie in a lamp, and it is soon seen that the angel guides the people sometimes intangibly, sometimes through the holiness of a person, and sometimes through a miraculous agency that gives the particular icon the status of being a "wonder-working icon." But above all, the peasant characters are clear and emphatic that the religious paintings of modern times are not icons at all, and worse yet that they are a kind of anti-icon—raising a barrier against the divine energies by substituting human cleverness and contrivance, selling mirrors as if they were windows. As the muzhiks of Leskov's story put it, such scoundrels "treat [the holiness of icons] in such a way that you feel ashamed for them and see in it all only sin and temptation and abuse of faith," for they are "shameless" in their eagerness "to hoodwink the trustful inexperienced with God's blessing."[24]

[24] Ibid, p. 80.

Chapter Sixteen From Fichte to Florensky: The Transformation of German Idealism Within Russian Philosophy

I

In the turbulent years between 1916 and 1926, one of Russia's most brilliant intellectuals worked intermittently, but persistently and even doggedly, on a text recalling his experiences growing up in the Caucasus Mountains—a curious pursuit, given his relatively young age of 34 at the book's inception. He called the resulting book *To My Children*—again a seemingly odd choice, since his own young children could not have comprehended the depths of his poetic and philosophical reflections on the "lost paradise" of his own childhood.[1] Perhaps he was seeking to anchor certain indispensible things from his past, sensing the forces of change in Russia that were sweeping away everything before them—changes so rapid and so radical that during this time, Walter Benjamin in his *Moscow Diary* would comment on a "strange term" having come into recent currency: "has beens" *(byvshie liudi)* denoting "those citizens who were dispossessed by the Revolution and who have been unable to adapt to the new situation."[2] And perhaps, too, Florensky saw with growing urgency that the materialist tidal wave that Benjamin terms "the withering away of private life" would surely, sooner or later, inexorably demolish a man such as himself—a man whose own life was anchored in prayer and the practice of *hesychia* or stillness that is integral to Byzantine and Russian spirituality—leaving him an uncertain hope of transmitting these important things to his children later, in person.[3]

In these reflections, Florensky describes how nature everywhere spoke to him, manifested to him its inner life—emphasizes what he called "the unusual yet sweetly known and familiar revelation from native deeps" that surrounded him in the wild high country and on gentle Black Sea shores of his native Georgia—

[1] Pyman, p. 144.

[2] Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, ed. Gary Smith, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 85.

[3] Ibid., see also p. 73.

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_16

realities that continued to motivate his studies in mathematics, science, philosophy, and theology even to his final days, which he spent conducting research on algae while confined in the brutal Solovetsky Monastery *Gulag* on the White Sea, just below the Arctic Circle.[4] It was not physical nature as such that enthralled and enchanted him, but what he later called the "*Empyrean*"—the divine or heavenly—that he found manifest in the empirical or earthly, and which he associated with the inner depths of things, their noumenal character as they were rooted in the Divine, a rootedness that he would call "Sophia" or Divine Wisdom, uniting the two worlds, forming a bridge between them. "All my life I have thought, basically, about one thing: about the relationship of the phenomenon to the noumenon, of its manifestation, its incarnation."[5] Not surprisingly, then, Florensky came to find his nemesis in the great German philosopher who, perhaps more than any other, he felt had led modern thought astray: "The Kantian separation of noumena and phenomena (even when I had no suspicion of the existence of any one of these terms: 'Kantian,' 'separation,' 'noumena' and 'phenomena') I rejected with all my being."[6] Instead, Florensky felt strongly drawn to the tradition of Platonism, which he saw as joining together these two worlds, of showing how the visible made manifest the invisible, and how the invisible shines through the visible. "In contrast [to Kantian thought]," notes Florensky, "I was always a Platonist… the appearance was for me always the appearance of the spiritual world." And thus, "the appearance—two-in-one, spiritual-material symbol—was always precious to me in its immediacy."[7]

II

In his conviction that the separation between the noumenal and phenomenal, the empyrean and the empirical, being and appearance, must be overcome, Florensky seems to touch upon one of the principal motives of German Idealism, arguably one that leads even Kant himself to restore a certain twilight of the noumenal through his postulates of practical reason. And indeed, Florensky appropriated much from German Idealism in his efforts at bridge-building—as did his friend and colleague Sergei Bulgakov. Yet at the outset, a critical question must be addressed: are the two terms that are to be bridged or brought together the same in German Idealism as in Florensky, Bulgakov, and others in the Russian Slavophile tradition?

---

[4] Pavel Florensky, *For My Children*, trans. in Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius*, New York: Continuum, 2010. p. 9. Pyman has an illuminating discussion of Florensky's early essay, "On the Empirical and the Empyrean" on pp. 41–45. Written in 1904, it provides an important prolegomenon to his major work, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, much of which was written by 1908, but which was not published until 1914.

[5] Ibid, emphasis added.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Florensky, *For My Children*, my own English translation from the German translation: Pawel Floresnki, *Meinen Kindern: Erinnerungen an eine Jugend im Kaukasus*, Stuttgart: Verlag Urachhaus Johannes M. Mayer, 1993, p. 212.

German Idealist thought characteristically moves between binary terms congenial to moderns: I and not-I, spirit and nature, subject and substance, concept and intuition, spontaneity and receptivity, subject and object. Whereas the Russians are at first glance much more concerned with somewhat different correlations, i.e. with binaries closer to those of ancient and medieval philosophy: dualities such as being and appearance, unity and multiplicity, same and other, transcendence and immanence. Thus, it would seem that the Russian thinkers are concerned with what Kant and his successors would have viewed as dogmatic or pre-critical dualities, addressing metaphysical questions that typically evade the problem of how this kind of questioning is itself possible. But on closer inspection, the comparison becomes even more vexing, since Florensky and Bulgakov are by no means oblivious to the epistemological questions raised by Kant's critical philosophy. Thus, it can be argued that unlike German Idealism—whose Kantian legacy anchored it *within* the sphere of reflexivity, seeking to unite binary terms that must be defined transcendentally—the Russian thinkers attempted to *work through* the reflexive, transcendental sphere—the field of modern subjectivity—back into a domain in which they could then work upon a resolution of the very terms that the critical philosophy had regarded as superseded. That is, they sought to work through the modern, subject-object dualism in order to address the ancient immanence-transcendence dualism that the former had obscured—but in a post-modern, rather than a pre-modern, manner.

III

"True being is elsewhere." So the Eleatic sage seems to insist, as he narrates his mystical ascent to the world of being, the realm of "what is," leaving behind those who know only one story, a deceptive tale of appearance and seeming and the non-being that cannot really be. *"On the contrary, true being is right before us,"* the obliquely spoken, cryptic Ephesian seems to respond, yet immediately he adds that few of us actually have the eyes to see and the ears to apprehend it. Most of us live as if we are asleep, oblivious to the Logos that everywhere surrounds us.

Two worlds or one? For we can just as easily read Parmenides as showing us how being and appearance are inseparable, "necessarily" intertwined, while understanding Heraclitus as enjoining us to turn from one world, a damp and dark world that is closed in upon itself—a world of straw that appears golden to the eyes of donkeys—toward another world, a world of light and intelligibility, a world composed of what is common to all. Two worlds? Or two ways in which the one world can be disclosed? In Platonic terms, what and where is the *methexis* or mode of participation that allows the higher realm to reveal itself within the lower? And what is the character of the *chōrismos* or separation between the two? The answers will determine how the two worlds can be bridged. Moreover, with the advent of Christianity into the intellectual landscape of Late Antiquity and the gradual marriage of Athens and Jerusalem, these questions become intensified, if not altogether transformed.

For if true being is to be found only in a transcendent God, then it must reside beyond the visible world in which things appear: the cleavage between being and appearance would thus be metaphysical rather than simply epistemological, incorrigibly embedded within the structure of being itself. The real, in this case, could not be made manifest within the realm of appearance. This metaphysical separation develops in Western Christendom to the point where Thomas Aquinas maintains there can be no direct knowledge of God, who transcends the visible world. Love, grace, the very peace that Christ had promised are no longer uncreated realities, but parts of creation itself, leaving us cut off from contact and communion with the Creator. And with the nominalism of Ockham, even the so-called "transcendentals" that had offered indirect, analogical hints about of the Divine being, are themselves driven away, leaving a flattened and disenchanted world, an empirical realm from which the empyrean has fled. The *analogia entis* that the Scholastics had used as a springboard for inferring the divine being has now lost its power and efficacy. God becomes radically transcendent—only approachable, as Luther understood, through faith. To philosophical thought, however, true being—to the extent that its locus is within a transcendent dimension—is now a black box, a noumenon, a thing-in-itself = x. What is left, then, for the enterprise of philosophy?

The most influential answer was that of Descartes, for whom the transparency of consciousness to itself becomes the new *fundamentum inconcussum* or unshakeable foundation for metaphysics, a mode of being so incontrovertible that alongside it even the being of the world itself (now conceived as "outside" the conscious subject) is cast into doubt. As developed by Kant, this transcendental reflexivity becomes a properly human foundation, fitting for finite knowers who do not create the objects of their own knowledge, but who are at the same time called to act in conformity with an ethical imperative that presupposes a positive affirmation of the noumenal realities that theory cannot grasp intellectually: God, freedom, and immortality. Less humble, however, are those German philosophers—beginning with Fichte—who seek to proceed from the transparency of subjectivity to the noumenal itself, yet without abandoning that transcendental foundation. As Habermas noted approvingly, this is the same movement that underlies the Freudian project: the gradual expansion of consciousness into areas formerly dark and unexplored, not unlike the Dutch people progressively reclaiming dry land from the sea. Likewise Hegel, in his *History of Philosophy,* had compared the Cartesian discovery of the *cogito* to setting foot on dry land after a long voyage at sea. So understood, German Idealism would be a kind of metaphysical colonization—an expansion of civilization and light into the dark continent of … the not-I, or nature, or art, or substance, or … the very being of the divine.

IV

But this same eruption of divine transcendence into the philosophical universe of antiquity was understood quite differently in the Greek East, and this was to have profound implications for Russian thought. Here, Greek philosophy was appropriated freely and often creatively in centers of learning such as Alexandria and Constantinople. Hence, the tensions between faith and reason, between transcendence and immanence, between Athens and Jerusalem that became so vexing in Western Christendom never became intractable. Four elements of Eastern Christian thought in particular led to a very different philosophical landscape both in Byzantium and in Russia.

First, the Heraclitean notion of a cosmic *logos*—embedded in things themselves and apprehensible by those beings who themselves not only exhibit the logos, but who stand inside it—is retained and radically transformed. According to Maximus the Confessor, for example, all things have their own, individual *logoi*, an inner principle of meaning and intelligibility that in unique and unrepeatable ways manifests the Eternal Logos, now understood as a Person of the Godhead. And in these *logoi*, we find the kind of bridge or intermediate realm between immanence and transcendence that was atrophying in the West, and for which the Scholastic doctrine of *analogia entis* was intended to compensate.

Second is the vital distinction between the divine essence (*ousia*) and the divine energies or activities (*energeia*) that was either poorly understood in the West, or rejected altogether. While the divine essence is radically mysterious and hidden, forever unknowable by humans or even by the angelic hierarchies, the divine activities or energies surround us everywhere and in all things. Moreover, they can be apprehended noetically by the human knower—a notion perhaps suggestively parallel to what German Idealism called "intellectual intuition." But how and for whom is such illumined seeing possible?

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." So says the Sixth Beatitude, in its exhortations to the multitudes resting upon a hill looking out upon the Sea of Galilee. And accordingly, asceticism plays a critical role in higher modes of knowledge that seek to remain close to the intensified realm of lived experience that is recorded in the Gospels. Thus, thirdly, there are ascetic prerequisites to this knowledge: *katharsis* or *purification* of the soul is necessary for the illumination (*theōria*) that can apprehend the immanence of the divine energies and the inner *logoi* manifest in the world. This latter was called *theōria physikē,* and it was seen as the second stage of spiritual growth, a common legacy to all the faithful, and by no means an exclusive possession of either the learned or the reclusive.

Fourthly, from the first three elements follows the view that true theology is an empirical science, a noetic science based upon the experience of God, with dogma seen as simply a record of shared experience. That is, the person who can give a true account or *logos* of God must be someone who has experienced the divine energies.

V

This philosophical orientation has persisted in the Greece and the Balkans, and in the Christian Middle East, to this day. And it was just as intact in Russia prior to the powerful, and not infrequently violent Westernizing efforts of the Czars and the growing aristocratic class inaugurated by Peter the Great in the early eighteenth century. Suddenly, abruptly, an intellectual and spiritual tradition continuous with the Christian thought of Late Antiquity was confronted forcefully with the conceptual world of the Enlightenment. Old Russia, whose thought was shaped by ascetic monks and prayerful iconographers, gave way to an aristocracy of Francophile intellectuals who championed the rationalistic ideas of Western modernity.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a robust counter-movement had emerged, critical of the current generation of Westernizers such as Belinsky and Herzen. In literature, this included such writers as Gogol and Dostoevsky. In philosophy, it was embodied by the misleadingly named Slavophiles, who wanted not to reject Western ideas altogether, but rather saw them as imbalanced and in need of the very kind of correction that the tradition of Old Russia had to offer—a tradition established in Russia, in the words of Ivan Kireyevsky, by "hermits [who] having left a life of luxury for the forest, in inaccessible gorges learned the writings of the profoundest sages of Christian Greece."[8]

Kireyevsky was a founder of the Slavophile movement, and he stated its goal with some precision: "The task of Russian philosophy is not to reject Western thought, but to supplement it with what is revealed in higher spiritual vision—the living experience of 'higher knowledge'—in which wholeness of spirit, which was lost in the Fall and impaired by the triumph of logical thought in Western Christianity, is recovered."[9] This quest to retrieve from the one-dimensional shallows of Enlightenment rationality a "wholeness of spirit" that was becoming lost is strikingly resonant of the enthusiasm for Ancient Greece that bound together Schelling, Hölderlin, and Hegel in their Tübingen days. But while for the latter this entailed a movement away from the Church, for the Slavophiles it meant precisely the opposite. Whereas for the three young seminarians the Church signified the hidebound doctrines of the Protestant establishment in Germany, for the Slavophiles it meant access to a "higher truth," a living truth, a mystical truth.

Looking back on the Slavophile movement, Florensky saw the Orthodox Church as "the sacred center from which the thoughts of the Slavophiles emanated." But he adds that "the essence of Orthodoxy is *ontologism*—the 'reception of reality from God' as given, not as created by humanity. The essence of Orthodoxy is humility and gratitude."[10] And how different this is from the self-positing, along with the reduction of otherness to self-recognition, that characterizes so much of German

[8] Ivan Kireyevsky, "A Reply to Khomiakov," cited in *Elder Macarius*, p. 301.

[9] Ivan Kireyevsky, "On the Character of European Enlightenment," ibid., p. 300.

[10] Pavel Florensky, "From 'Around Khomiakov,'" in Boris Jakim and Robert Bird, (eds.) *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998) pp. 319, 322.

Idealism! The closest to being an exception here would surely be Schelling, whose "fundamental thought," in the words of Manfred Frank, was that "being or absolute identity is irreducible to the happening of reflection."[11] So it is not surprising to find Kireyevsky, in his manifesto "On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy," maintaining the following: "I believe that German philosophy, in combination with the development which it received in Schelling's last system, could serve us as the most convenient point of departure on our way from borrowed systems to an independent philosophy corresponding to the basic principles of ancient Russian culture and capable of subjecting the divided culture of the West to the integrated consciousness of believing reason."[12]

But of course, Kireyevsky refers to Schelling's final, "positive" philosophy, which however much it may have realized his "fundamental thought," is not only unrepresentative of German Idealism, but is widely and accurately regarded as showing the way *out of it*, leading variously to the work of Feuerbach, Marx, and Kierkegaard. This suggests that there is something curious and asymmetrical in the appropriation of German Idealist concepts and methodologies in Russian Philosophy. This is reflected in Kireyevsky's own philosophical development, having first been an admirer of the French Enlightenment himself, and going on to study briefly with both Hegel in Berlin and with Schelling in Munich. But most formative for him were the long periods he spent at the Optina Monastery hidden in the dense forests southwest of Moscow. Depicted in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky, who together with his young friend Solovyov had visited it, Optina Pustyn was the leading monastic center in the movement to retrieve the ancient hesychasm that had been the life-blood of Russian culture prior to Peter. It was formative, too, upon at least three generations of Russian intellectuals who sought to retrieve the wisdom of ancient Russia from Western cultural domination, and its visitors also included Gogol, Tolstoy, Bulgakov, and Florensky.

Thus, seen from the perspective of Optina, its majestic onion domes reaching up to heaven like flames of prayer, subjectivity appeared to be a very different kind of starting-point: not a self-securing beginning for metaphysics and epistemology, as it was for German Idealism, but no more than a point of departure for re-appropriating the noetic "higher knowledge" that Western rationality and transcendental subjectivity had themselves obscured—not in order to return to a pre-critical *Vorstellung* or representation of the real, nor to grasp philosophically how the real is constituted by subject or spirit, but to go beyond both representation and the self-enclosure of subjectivity to make living contact with the real by means of *askēsis* and the subsequent "humility and gratitude" emphasized by Florensky. To borrow from Plato, the goal of thinkers such as Kireyevsky and Florensky and Bulgakov was not to look at pictures of the sky, nor to peer out at the sky through sealed windows, but to go outside and feel the wind on the face and the sun on the skin. That is, German

[11] Cited in Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, p. 12.

[12] Ivan Kireyevsky, "On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy," in James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan, and Mary-Barbara Zeldin (eds.) *Russian Philosophy: Volume One*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) p. 213.

Idealism was understood as something that it was necessary to "work through" in order to become free of the very premises that grounded German Idealism itself—premises to which Westernization had irreversibly committed the Russian people. This can, perhaps, be more easily seen in the writings of Kireyevsky's younger contemporary, Fyodor Dostoevsky.

VI

During Dostoevsky's life, the first generation of Russian Westernizers had already progressed beyond the worldview of the French Enlightenment. For a brief time, this meant a superficial flirtation with Hegel, but the concerns of the Westernizers were less metaphysical and epistemological, than social and political, and thus interested mostly in Hegel's philosophy of history and his political philosophy. Metaphysically, they were content with a rather uncritical materialism and an equally dogmatic atheism, for they saw social change as the only serious task. And soon they found their way to Feuerbach and Marx, who better served their goals. So by the time of Dostoevsky, the earlier generation of Westernizers (humanitarian, rationalist, and progressive) was passing over into the generation of Nihilists; they were the generation immortalized in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. This new vanguard quickly embraced a much more assertive materialism and a radicalized utilitarianism, along with a rather naïve valorization of the natural sciences, in an attempt to remold and remake society in dramatic and often violent manners, such as the assassination of Czar Nicholas II, which set back social reforms at least a half century. They were, not surprisingly, the predecessors of yet a third and far more triumphant wave of Westernization, embodied in the October 1917 *coup d'état* of the Bolsheviks.

Even more than Gogol and Tolstoy, Dostoevsky challenges the boundaries we usually assume between literature, philosophy, and theology. In a sequence of writings beginning with "Notes from the Underground" (1864); proceeding through *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868), *Demons* or *The Possessed* (1872); and culminating in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) Dostoevsky critically addresses the influence on Russian society of Western ideas being advanced by the Westernizers and the Nihilists. Himself a Slavophile, Dostoevsky felt strongly that the great task for Russia was to help restore to Western Europe the intellectual and spiritual balance it had lost through its over-emphasis on discursive rationality and humanism. This had, in fact, always been the self-understanding of Byzantine civilization—with the double-eagle that dominated both the Byzantine flag and the flag of pre-Czarist Russia, the eagle looking in two directions, symbolizing not just the union of Asia and Europe, but even more the union of the Western focus on the rational and juridical with the Eastern emphasis on the aesthetic and mystical.

"Notes from the Underground" depicts a man whose all-consuming subjectivity and unrestrained rationalism have swallowed up the world around him, leaving him bitter and alienated, beset by a loneliness that he is quite incapable of acknowledging.

Here, the self-conscious I has consummated a deeply combative relation with the not-I, deploying reason to gnaw upon all that is outside consciousness: nature, society, science and rationality itself, and indeed even (and perhaps above all) the very self that is fated to be conscious of itself. And in the final section, "Apropos the Wet Snow," when he is offered a change to break the spell of reflexivity through reciprocal love, he is drawn back underground, back into the vortex of self-hood—of what Levinas would later call ipseity and totality. And in succeeding novels, Dostoevsky pursues variations on this theme of the Westernized, hyper-conscious, hyper-rationalistic individual bringing destruction upon himself and those around him.

Finally, in *The Brothers Karamazov* and its confrontations between Ivan, a Westernized intellectual, and his brother Alyosha, representing the deep piety of Old Russia—and even more explicitly in the life and discourses of Elder Zosima, who embodies the revival of Russian spirituality at Optina—Dostoevsky offers perhaps the most powerful articulation of ancient Russian spirituality in a modern idiom.[13]

In this novel, the discourses of Elder Zosima, whose character was modeled on Elder Ambrose of Optina Pustyn, narrate three conversions, three movements of *metanoia* or change of heart leading away from self-enclosed, self-absorbed lives and into ecstatic lives, lives joyfully open to the world and above all to the modes in which the world outside the self manifests divinity, forming the kind of bridge or medium between immanence and transcendence, appearance and being, that the Byzantines designated with terms like *logoi* and *energeiai*, and which Florensky and Bulgakov call Sophia. In each case, the character emerges from the torment of a self unable to love—and importantly, Zosima defines hell itself as the inability to love—into an awareness that they have been in paradise all along, only lacking the eyes to see. That is, they lack the purity of heart, the simple humility, the ingenuous sincerity of a young bargeman whom Zosima recounts meeting late on a summer night on the shores of some great river, perhaps the Volga:

> It was a bright, still, warm July night, the river was wide, a refreshing mist rose from it, once in a while a fish would splash softly, the birds fell silent, all was quiet, gracious, all praying to God. And only the two of us, myself and this young man, were still awake, and we got to talking about the beauty of this world of God's, and about its great mystery. For each blade of grass, each little bug, ant, golden bee, knows its way amazingly: being without reason, they witness to the diving mystery, they ceaselessly enact it. And I could see that the good lad's heart was burning. He told me how he loved the forest and the forest birds. … "I don't know of anything better than the forest," he said, "though all things are good." "Truly," I answered him, "all things are good and splendid, because all is truth… for the Word is for all, all creation and all creatures, every little leaf is striving towards the Word, sings glory to God, weeps to Christ, unbeknownst to itself, doing so through the mystery of its sinless life."[14]

---

[13] Dostoevsky, in his journals and letters, emphasized that the rationalistic and nihilistic views of Ivan could not be refuted by arguments, but only by life: looking backward, the life of Elder Zosima which is coming to an end, and that of Alyosha, which is just beginning. As with Kant and many of his German successors, the theoretical *aporia* can only be resolved in practice and in life.

[14] *Karamazov*, pp. 294f.

Here is an innocent, uncomplicated, unassuming life that is nevertheless radically open to what Florensky calls the noumenal—it is the life not of a theologian or philosopher nor even a poet, but of a simple working man who spends long days pulling barges from alongside the river, as depicted in Ilya Repin's heart-rending painting, "Barge Haulers on the Volga." Here, in the lyrical reflections of the young bargeman, is reflected the beauty that characterizes the Divine Sophia, the Wisdom of God that silently orders the cosmos, itself everywhere testifying to the Divine Logos and manifesting the Divine Energies. If we are to define paradise as a world transparent to God, a world in which God is manifest in all things, this is the paradise that surrounds us if we are able to step out of the cave, and respond with love to the beauty that addresses us. It summarizes not only the Byzantine worldview and the sensibilities of Old Russia, but it resembles the vision guiding the young Tübingen seminarians and expressed in Hölderlin 's slogan that they embraced as a watchword: *Hen kai Pan*, "the One and the All." And the love that Schelling and Hegel had once seen as the key to entering this Eden—for them, the golden youth of the West, in Ancient Greece—had been a love perhaps akin to what Dostoevsky presents here. But this was soon left behind as they took up Fichte's project of completing the Kantian system through penetrating ever more deeply into transcendental subjectivity and expanding its dominion—precisely the opposite direction from the one followed by the Slavophiles and soon by Bulgakov and Florensky.

VII

Like many of his contemporaries, Sergei Bulgakov, the son of a village priest, had embraced Western materialism and the social reforms it seemed to promise. He quickly became one of the intellectual giants of Russian Marxism, working to demonstrate the power of Marxist economics for addressing agricultural concerns in Russia. However, his research soon led him to the opposite conclusion, that Marxist economics was altogether inadequate for Russian conditions. This conviction was soon bolstered by what appears to have been a mystical experience at his first sight of the Caucasus Mountains:

> Evening was falling. We were traveling across the southern steppe, covered with the fragrance of honey-colored grass and hay, gilded with the crimson of a sublime sunset. In the distance the fast-approaching Caucasus Mountains appeared blue. I was seeing them for the first time. And fixing my avid gaze on the mountains that had opened before me, drinking in the light and air, I harkened to the revelation of nature. My soul had grown accustomed long ago to see with a dull silent pain only a dead wasteland in nature beneath the veil of beauty, as under a deceptive mask; without being aware of it, my soul was not reconciled with a nature without God. And suddenly in that hour my soul became agitated, started to rejoice and began to shiver: *but what if* … if it is not wasteland, not a lie, not a mask, not death but him, the blessed and loving Father, his raiment, his love … My heart pounded [as] we hurried towards that burnt gold and those blue-gray mountains.[15]

[15] Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012) p. 8.

This view of nature as a dead and lifeless mask that Bulgakov had found so oppressive reflects Marxist materialism, but ultimately derives from the same Kantian metaphysic against which his friend Florensky had rebelled as a youth: nature as mere *Erscheinung*, as flattened surface, as mask with no face behind it. In *The Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, Bulgakov showed how Marx's view of nature uncritically appropriated Kant's understanding of nature as *Gegenstand* or object of experience, while naively assuming that the knowing subject of experience was *itself* merely an object as well, leading Marx to see labor as the external effect of one object upon another.

But we are not only *in nature* as objects—nature is *in us* as well. We experience nature not as indifferent matter, but as inherently meaningful—i.e. as *ecos* or household, for which we are ourselves the correlative proprietors. Nature is not for us a Kantian object, but a *household* ripe with human meaning; it is always already in its very givenness *humanized*. Moreover, science is itself part of that humanization from within nature, not a disengaged mirroring from outside it. Correspondingly, the genuine "subject" cannot be what Bulgakov calls "the Kantian epistemological subject"—"the mind of a scientist preparing an experiment"— detached, and disembodied.[16] We are proprietors, concerning ourselves with the household. Or as Heidegger would later maintain, dwelling is founded upon caring. Nature most primordially reveals itself for us and within us through our circumspection and care, which discloses the proper study of economics: the world as *ecos* or household and its *nomoi* or laws.

"Every economic act," Bulgakov writes, "realizes a certain fusion of subject and object, the penetration of the subject into the object, the *subjectification of the object*—or the subject's *exit from itself into the world of things*, into the object, that is, an *objectification of the subject*."[17] Humanity in nature, and, nature in humanity. Objectification of the subject and subjectification of the object. Bulgakov notes here his debt to Schelling's philosophy of identity, for which "nature must be visible spirit, and spirit must be invisible nature."[18] But he emphasizes that Schelling himself draws upon the more ancient philosophy of identity of Christian thought and experience, for which "the human incarnation of God brought about a divinization of the flesh."[19]

Moreover, economics presupposes a unitary field that must be already in place, prior to any individual engagement with it. "*Economy* as a whole," argues Bulgakov, "is not only logically but empirically prior to separate economic acts."[20] But how to ontologically ground the economic domain? That is, who is the subject of economy as a whole? "The single true transcendental subject of economic activity, the personification of *pure economy*, is not any given individual but *humanity as a*

---

[16] PE, p. 181.

[17] PE, p. 77.

[18] PE, p. 85.

[19] PE, p. 88.

[20] Ibid., 124f.

whole."[21] Ontologically, Bulgakov understands this concept of a universal subject in a robustly realist manner, neither as abstraction nor universal. For economic acts to cohere into a system, human knowers and agents must not be impermeable to one another, but function as nodal points for humanity as a whole.[22]

"There is one subject," Bulgakov maintains, "and not many: the transcendental subject of knowledge, of economy, of history is clearly one and the same."[23] Bulgakov thus regards Kant's individuation of the transcendental subject as a "mystical misstep" reflecting "the fundamental sin of Protestantism," i.e., making individual will and consciousness exterior to the "supraindividual unity" of humanity.[24] This does not, of course, mean that individuals are somehow unreal, but simply that they actualize their own, individual humanity through taking part in their shared, common humanity: "*Only one truly knows, but many engage in the process of cognition.*"[25] This collective, universal humanity has been called since antiquity the world-soul, and Bulgakov traces its lineage from Plato and Plotinus through Sts. Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and Scotus Eriugena to Böhme, Schelling, and Solovyov in modern times. As world proprietor, humanity is itself the world-soul, the very *eye* of the world soul—nature acting upon itself, the world recognizing and realizing itself through humanity. And the goal of that self-realization is a permeation of nature with humanity, an infusion that is just as complete as the manner in which nature permeates humanity itself, even within all that seems most purely ideal. That reciprocal interpenetration takes place not just in agriculture and industry, but also through knowledge and preeminently through art—the completed self-realization of nature within the element of beauty. Once again, Bulgakov appeals to Schelling: "The mystery of the world, the identity of the ideal and the real, is revealed in art. This is why," he continues, "Schelling calls art the 'universal organ of philosophy.'"[26]

But art, like science and even simpler economic activities such as tool-making and agriculture, all proceed from the same source: the discovery within nature as *natura naturata* of certain vital interrelationships—of an unbounded field of reciprocally connected and mutually penetrating forces, a "logos of things," that we ourselves engage as both participants and revealers. Evoking the *logoi* of Maximus along with the Stoic thought of the *logos spermatikos*, Bulgakov writes some years later that "nature is not empty, but full. It is full of *logoi*, ontic seeds, which precontain the *all* of cosmic being."[27] Everywhere we find incipient life, organic interactions and the palate of the beautiful, but awaiting liberation through our knowledge and creativity—we find *natura naturans*. And with *natura naturans*, we discover

[21] Ibid., 126.

[22] Ibid., 131.

[23] Ibid., 132.

[24] Ibid., 304, n.7.

[25] Ibid., 130.

[26] PE, p. 92.

[27] Sergei Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). I have substituted here the Greek "*logoi*" for the translator's rendering from the Russian as "logoses."

once again the world soul—this time not in humanity as transcendental subject, but in nature as transcendental object. But what he has called "world soul," bridging and uniting subject and object, nature and humanity, Bulgakov now calls Sophia, evoking the Divine Sophia revealed in the Old Testament Wisdom Books—where it bridges heaven and earth—and later gives its name to the great temples of Constantinople, Kyiv, and Novgorod—where art and architecture, poetry and song and liturgy all serve to draw together heaven and earth, or rather to disclose the infusion of earth with divine energies that is always already taking place.

Sophia is for Bulgakov the inner ordering-principle of creation—it reveals the rootedness of creation in the divine energies, and thus its Edenic or paradisiac reality. Rays of these Sophianic energies shine through in the beauty of nature, inviting us to disclose and actualize the Edenic being of the world in our economic activity—not just through labor and manufacture, but through art and poetry and thought, to which Bulgakov attributes an even higher sophianic role. But it is also possible to work against them, to disfigure and distort the world in service to human desires, to create what Bulgakov calls a diabolical economy.

At this point, however, certain difficulties in the philosophy of religion emerge. For it could only be within a specifically religious mode of experience that this rootedness of the world in paradise could be known. Such questions, then, lead toward a second volume, which Bulgakov titled *The Unfading Light*. The earlier work, *The Philosophy of Economy* published in 1912, is essentially a treatise in social theory, proceeding from Marx by way of Schelling. The sequel, published in 1917, is a project of cosmology and anthropology, developing the two terms of the first book, nature and humanity, from a religious point of view, now emphasizing Sophia not just as a bridge between subject and object, but as a bridge between transcendence and immanence, while showing in Kantian fashion how the dynamic tension between the transcendent and the immanent constitutes the condition for the possibility of religious experience as such.

"Every prayer," Bulgakov maintains here, "realizes the command: *transcende te ipsum*, 'go beyond yourself.'"[28] Thus, in the first book, he resolves the modern dualism of subject and object, allowing him in its sequel to address the ancient dilemma of immanence and transcendence, effectively moving through modernity and German Idealism *to retrieve* within a modern idiom the problematic of antiquity. But despite the richness of its historical and philosophical details, *The Unfading Light* in its essentials draws heavily upon Florensky's work, to which for the sake of brevity we must now turn.

[28] UL, p. 24.

VIII

Florensky's masterpiece, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, mixes poetic images with philological exegesis, extensive logical formalism with lightening flashes of deep philosophical insight, poignant autobiographical reflections with exhaustive scholarly research. Moreover, it is a carefully written, tightly argued book that is highly resistant to being abstracted. From this work, then, it is possible to consider only a few of its main points, chosen to clarify Florensky's relation to German Idealism, and presented quite schematically, with the hope of generating interest in a more serious reading of this remarkable book.

"Living religious experience" is the only legitimate path to the highest knowledge.[29] So Florensky begins his masterpiece, aligning himself with Schelling's later, "positive" philosophy, with the "radical empiricism" of William James, and with the later phenomenological movement. And within the book itself, such experience begins with autumnal thoughts of transience and the abyss of death, of the fluttering of falling leaves that quietly arouse the question of enduring truth, of Eternal Truth, of a second world that would serve (quoting Euripides and evoking Nietzsche) as "the sun of the world."[30] For theoretical thought, Florensky continues, the pillar of truth is certitude, and surely certitude must begin with the principle of identity A=A. Like Fichte, he sees this A=A as grounded in self-assertion, I=I. But unlike Fichte, Florensky sees this I=I as a desperate cry of naked egotism—and echoing Hegel, as a "dead desert of 'here' and 'now,'" refusing all content outside itself. So we turn instead from the I to the not-I, which is itself not given immediately, but only approximated through discursive reasoning, i.e. as something that must itself be understood through some third thing, and so on to the bad infinity of unending discursivity. So perhaps there is no ultimate truth at all? But neither can I rest in this skeptical truth as a certainty, for perhaps there might end up being truth after all, a hope that gnaws at the truth-seeker like a relentless and voracious worm.

If there is such a thing as truth, Florensky concludes, it would have to draw together both the givenness of intuition and the infinity of discursion. It would thus have to consist in an actual infinity—would have to be a self-constituting unity, or thought more concretely, a self-proving subject. And here Florensky arrives *intellectually* at the Christian dogma of the Holy Trinity, of a Self-proving Subject for Whom and within Whom "truth is the contemplation of Oneself through Another in a Third."[31] Moreover, this would entail the A of the first person passing over into the not-A of the second person, as mediated by a union with the not-not-A of the third person—in short, an ecstatic and self-emptying or kenotic union of love. And for the unity of this self-proving Subject to be Absolute, identity here would have to embrace absolute otherness: stated in Greek, it would require *homoousias*, the pivotal term of the Great First Council of Nicea which proclaimed the *homo-ousias*, or

[29] PGT, pp. 5, 9, 117, 120, 236.

[30] Ibid., pp. 10–13.

[31] Ibid., p. 37.

one essence, of the Three Trinitarian Persons. Thus, in the possibility of entering into this self-emptying unity of love—the possibility of what the Eastern Church has called *theōsis*—Florensky finds the condition for the possibility of the person, not as imprisoned within the I=I that is hateful of all otherness, but as migratory, as passing over into the other, as exhibiting the same self-emptying or kenotic love that it has first found in God as Self-proving Subject. Conversely to Descartes, who proves God on the basis of the self, Florensky proves the self on the basis of God!

But so far this is merely an intellectual conclusion. How to meet Florensky's requirement that it be confirmed in living experience? There is both a "how" and a "wherein" corresponding to this question. The "how" is asceticism, understood not as masochistic self-punishment, but as the willingness to leave behind the prison of the self through purification from the passions. And the "wherein" is Divine Love, first as manifested in the Sophianic beauty of creation, and secondly as most concretely embodied within the *ekklesia*, the Church understood as the Sophianic embodiment of Christ upon earth. In fact, Florensky argues, these two belong together. For it is among the true ascetics—in contrast to the false, neo-gnostic, reactionary ascetics who despise the world—that we can find the greatest love for creation, i.e. the ability and propensity to noetically see God everywhere—both rooted in the capacity of the ascetically purified soul to respond to the Sophianic invitation of creation. Moreover, this asceticism has a cognitive dimension, for seen from the viewpoint of discursive rationality, noetic or mystical experience always poses antinomies—a claim for which Florensky, whose academic training was primarily in mathematics, provides an extensive and rigorous proof. But this will not be surprising to students of mysticism, for in the *koan* of Zen, the paradoxes of the Sufis, the great *"neti, neti"* ("neither this, nor that") of Hinduism, and the apophaticism of the Byzantine East, we find paradox and antinomy as the discursive element within which higher truth is embodied. Thus, along with enslaving passions and base desires, the self must leave behind its own, rationalistic insistence on understanding the transcendent beforehand, and on its own terms—like Abraham leaving behind his familiar home for an unimaginable promised land. Authentic religious experience, then, would find that the truest knowledge is essentially migratory, ecstatic, self-emptying, erotic, and above all presupposing a radical epistemological realism. "Knowing," he argues, "is an ontological act… a real *going* of knower *out* of himself, or (what is the same thing) a real *going* of what is known *into* the knower."[32] For Florensky, then, Abraham's journey to the unknown, from Ur to Canaan, exemplifies the movement beyond the polarity of I and not-I, of subject and object, entailing (1) the realization that truth can only be found on the other side of this dualism, and (2) the ascetic openness to the modes of love that can themselves lead beyond this modern dichotomy— divine love as manifest in the Sophianic beauty of creation and more fully the empyrean love of God that is sheltered within the mysteries of the Church, the authentic Pillar and Ground of Truth.

[32] Ibid., p. 55.

IX

Descartes discovered the self-grounding, self-generating character of the *cogito*—of pure self-consciousness—as a radical mode of experience. Yet he promptly abandoned it *as* a mode of experience in order to make it the foundation for an ambitious conceptual edifice, a system that by the fact of this regression, reverted to a pre-critical or dogmatic naiveté. For Kant, in turn, transcendental apperception was no longer *explicitly* an experience at all, but an intellectual concept, a foundation for his architectonic showing how different modes of knowledge could be constituted. But beginning with Fichte, transcendental subjectivity becomes *itself a primary mode of experience*— as with Descartes, a radical mode of experience, but now at the same time a *foundational and constitutive* mode of experience as well, one that seeks to assimilate not only its own objects, but all other modes of experience as well into an ultimate coherence, a unified totality. And above all, this self-reflexivity seeks to appropriate its own other, to comprehend it and penetrate it with consciousness, to make it transparent to knowledge, assimilating the other to the same. Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel all strive toward what Hegel called pure self-recognition in absolute otherness, and yet all founder upon the dilemma that as soon as this otherness is comprehended, it becomes apparent that it is only the *concept* of the other that has become transparent, while the *other itself* (and above all the noumenal reality that had been the ultimate prize all along) has remained utterly out of reach.

The later Schelling seeks to break out of this reflexive circle in his final, "positive" philosophy, but never manages to proceed beyond a program and an outline, raising the question or whether any system can comprehend what lies outside it and is other to it. Some philosophers, such as the so-called Hegelian Left, happily assumed this totalizing character of modern consciousness as a *fait accompli*, making way for the radical humanism and materialism of Feuerbach and the objectifying scientism of Marx, and resulting in a system of pure immanence, from which any trace of transcendence has vanished—yet as Bulgakov shows, all this while at the same time naively forgetting that the very objective totality being posited is itself totalized *within* consciousness. Here, the objective pole—an objectified world—becomes a prison-house of immanence.

But subjectivity itself can become a prison as well, despite its promises of freedom and spontaneity. Kierkegaard, the champion of subjectivity, discloses subjectivity as a prison of irony and self-reference, as he presents a labyrinth of pseudonyms and an *aporia* of despair in his final work, *The Sickness Unto Death*. But even as he develops his ironic, pseudonymous authorship, he is simultaneously writing a series of "edifying discourses" that presents a simple religious consciousness, manifesting all along through the viewpoint of its (named) author the prescription at which (the pseudonymous) *The Sickness Unto Death* finally arrives—a transparent "resting" in the power that constitutes self-consciousness itself, the "movement" that earlier, toward the beginning of his authorship, he found in Abraham, the Father of Faith. Subjectivity, irony, and the world-constituting power attributed to consciousness are

revealed in their most radical, most poignant, and most encapsulating power in Nietzsche, as he himself suggests:

> I call myself the last philosopher because I am the last human being. No one talks to me other than myself, and my voice comes to me as the voice of a dying man. With you, beloved voice, with you, the last vaporous remembrance of all human happiness, let me tarry an hour longer. With your help I shall deceive myself about my loneliness: I shall lie my way back into society and love. For my heart refuses to believe that love is dead, cannot bear the terror of the loneliest loneliness: it compels me to talk, as though I were two.[33]

In this arresting passage, we discover at the inception of post-modern consciousness the pathos of loneliness and self-imprisonment that arises from the subjectivity and irony that are now becoming our shared legacy in an increasingly post-modern world. Yet at the same time, we hear a deep longing for *ekstasis*, for contact and union—for love. Perhaps too for music, which Nietzsche loved above all. And no mode of music better characterizes this tension—this unresolved, post-modern polarity between the Narcissistic self-possession of ironic consciousness and the lagging inability to give up the innocence of pure and self-transcending love—than does jazz, especially in some of its more sophisticated forms. We sense it in Coltrane's alternately halting and soaring elaborations on "Favorite Things." Or better yet, listening to Eric Dolphy's rendition of "Stormy Weather" in Mingus' *Hentoff Sessions,* we hear the music move enticingly, irresistibly from a playful, ironic, mocking rendition of Harold Arlen's melody, into a heartbreakingly sweet, primally sincere, and intensely plaintive longing for the restoration of the lost love that the lyrics evoke—hear a passionate attempt to transcend the loss of love and re-union underlying Nietzsche's ironic, nostalgic confession. And I will even suggest that in the seemingly anomalous attraction toward transcendence increasingly evident in post-modern thinkers such as Derrida, Vattimo, and Zizek, we find something of the same yearning and the same poignancy.

I have tried to show, risking egregious over-simplification, how Kireyevsky, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov and Florensky to varying degrees break through and go beyond the prison-walls of subjectivity, without simply reverting to a pre-modern or dogmatic position. But was German Idealism itself entirely unsuccessful in at least seeing this as a challenge, if not in arriving at a resolution? Recent scholarship in German Idealism—for example the work of Dieter Henrich, Manfred Frank, and Rudiger Bubner—is now recognizing the importance of Friedrich Hölderlin not just as one of Germany's greatest poets, but as perhaps the most original philosopher at the *Tübingen Stift*, even if the least prolific in his prose writings. And although the Russian thinkers discussed here could hardly have been aware of his philosophical views, I want to maintain that Hölderlin's thought most evocatively anticipates the project undertaken by the Russians, even though he was unable to complete this project himself.

In his early fragment, *Seyn und Urtheil (Being and Judgment)*, Hölderlin posits that what is truly absolute is not the identity of subject and object pursued by

[33] Cited in David Farrell Krell and Donald L. Bates, *The Good European: Nietzsche's Work Sites in Word and Image*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) p. 84.

Schelling, but being *(Seyn)* understood as what precedes consciousness and identity altogether, preceding the very division (*or Ur-theil)* of subject and object, and hence entirely outside the domain of consciousness itself. But this means it is beyond the reach of philosophy as well, which cannot avoid the partitioning judgment *(Urtheil)* between subject and object upon which its thought is predicated. Hölderlin's poetry, of course, exhibits his own answer concerning how an "intellectual intuition" that could re-unite us with being—or as he will later say, with nature—can best be approached. But as his poetic project develops, "nature" is replaced with "the Holy," and it then becomes our separation from the divine that concerns him. "But my friend, we come too late," he laments in "Bread and Wine," adding that "the gods are indeed alive, but above our head in another world." They are, perhaps, only and at best intimated at night and in dreams, and so the poet continues: "too often I think it's better to sleep than to be friendless as we are, alone, always waiting, and what to do or to say in the meantime I don't know, and what [then] would be the point of poets in [these] destitute times?"

Hölderlin's lines here condense much of what I have wanted to argue concerning the relation between German Idealism and Russian religious philosophy. Western European thought at the time of German Idealism had reached a point at which true being and divinity itself had become ensconced in a metaphysically pristine and transcendent realm, "above our head in another world." German Idealism had tried to use philosophy to bridge that gap, but found itself left with nothing more than the thought of identity, still "friendless" and "alone," outside of being and removed from the Holy. Hölderlin made one of the first and most important attempts to construct a more efficacious bridge through weaving together the luminous poetry of day and the dark myths of night—yet parallel to Blake's efforts in this same direction, it was just as splendidly shipwrecked.

In contrast, the Russian philosophers have shown a path "through" consciousness, and beyond modern philosophy and the subject-object polarity upon which it is founded—a way that moves from asceticism, repentance, and humility through the power of love to arrive at a noetics of the uncreated energies of God. This would serve both to embrace certain central insights of Platonism as well as retrieve the pathway of Ancient Christianity, from which Eastern Christendom sees the West as having long ago departed. Thus, to the extent this resolution is viable, Russia would have given to the West just what Dostoevsky and the Slavophiles had foreseen: the gift of restoration to its own best and truest foundations.

Chapter Seventeen The Fluttering of Autumn Leaves: Logic, Mathematics, and Metaphysics in Florensky's "The Pillar and Ground of the Truth"

Two Worlds

Pavel Florensky's *The Pillar and the Ground of the Truth* is surely one of the most unusual books of philosophy published in the twentieth century. More often than not, it produces in the reader a consternation that has caused many to reject it altogether after a few glances, thinking it an example of the aestheticism and even decadence that has come to be associated with Russian Symbolism. This stigmatization is both unfortunate and unjust, for it is a work of great logical, mathematical, and philosophical rigor as well as a source of deep spiritual insight. Moreover, one of its primary claims is that the formal rigor of logic and mathematics is ontologically rooted—not just applicable to the real, but of one piece with being itself. And another of its claims is that spirituality does not concern some rarified dimension separate from empirical reality, divorced from the human body and natural science and works of art, but that it extends into and illumines every aspect of life; it does not inhabit a world unto itself. Transcendence and immanence, visible and invisible, are not just "two worlds," but ultimately two aspects of one world. Like Heraclitus and Parmenides before him, Florensky seeks to show that "it is wise to agree that all is one," *hen panta*.

Thus, for example, the sky-blue color which he chose for the cover of the book (and to which he devotes a 17 page excursus, rivaling Melville's chapter exploring the color white) is a visual representation of one of his central themes, "Sophia" or Divine Wisdom—the theme for which the book is best known, and which is perhaps better approached only after some of its more basic concepts have been mastered. So too, the book is written not as a series of chapters, but a sequence of twelve "Letters" written to a close, but unspecified friend, each of which (like a Japanese *haiku* poem) begins with an evocation of the natural surroundings that indicates the season of its writing and reflects a mood that attunes what follows. Each chapter is headed by a different graphic vignette, depicting some curious object or action, and

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_17

drawn from peculiar and esoteric sources, along with rather cryptic sayings that resonate with the vignette in some indefinable manner. Yet the text that follows is never something merely "aesthetic." It might just as likely involve a discussion of scientific findings, of world mythology, of mathematical analysis or philosophical logic, of comparative linguistics and etymology, of theological controversies from the fourth or eleventh centuries, and of course perennial philosophical difficulties—all interwoven and mutually illuminating one another, all advancing the investigation which the book undertakes in a rigorous and carefully crafted manner. But this lush and lavish variety is not put forth merely to display his extraordinary intellect and prodigious learning (which have made it fashionable to compare him to Leonardo da Vinci) but to show how each of these disciplines leads to the same understanding of his great themes—and thus how disciplines such as mathematics and theology and ethics might be not just interconnected, but properly understood, different languages for the saying the same things. If all things are one, then any starting point will lead to the same conclusion. And demonstrating this is not extraneous to the subject matter—a *tour de force* of intellectual virtuosity—but part of the argument itself, one that must be experienced by the reader, rather than merely asserted by the author.

At first glance, however, this bewildering juxtaposition of writing styles from the lyrical to the logical; of disparate disciplinary approaches and concepts; and of four different literary formats that includes two sizes of type and some 1057 footnoted elucidations occupying one quarter of the text, along with 15 often lengthy appendices—all this will seem disconnected and discontinuous, requiring strenuous leaps of understanding. And this is just as Florensky intended, for the idea of *discontinuity* is itself one of the key themes of the book, and the author attempts to lead the reader to this insight precisely through the employment of "discontinuous thoughts," as he characterizes his writing—a mode of exposition that he shares with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche before him, and Heidegger after him, not to mention the "dark," aphoristic style of his master, Heraclitus. Moreover, the author goes on to announce that he will be proceeding "without system, only placing a signpost here and there" with the expectation of arriving only at "schemata" and "fragments."[1] Visible and invisible, same and other, heaven and earth, transcendence and immanence are not two worlds but one. And yet it takes a leap, a discontinuous trajectory, to realize this—to experience the epiphany of the one within the many, of the heavenly within the earthly—and the most demanding and rigorous philosophical work to lead to the brink of this leap—and to convince the reader not to lose heart at the edge of the precipice. How, then, can genuine rigor of thought be combined with the kind of intuitive, and indeed existential, demands that are more commonly expected in poetic and religious writing?

"Letter One," itself subtitled "Two Worlds," begins early in the morning, on that first day in which it has become evident that summer is over and "something new" is in the air. "Golden leaves whirled over the ground in serpentine, wind-driven

[1] Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, tr. Boris Jakim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 1997, p. 13.

eddies," fluttering like butterflies. "The air was filled with the cool aroma of autumn, the smell of decaying leaves, a longing for the distances." "One after another, leaves were falling to earth … describing slow circles in the air as they descended to earth." "How good it was," he exclaims, "how joyous and sad" was the "sight of these fluttering leaves." "Autumn leaves keep falling, without interruption," the author continues, and as he watches them he reflects on friends who have come and gone, he reflects on temporality and death: "Everything whirls. Everything slides into death's abyss." Is there a center, he asks, toward which all these whirling trajectories would point—recalling perhaps the transcendent "point at infinity" that allows the infinite number of points on a given plane to converge around the Riemann Sphere, but more explicitly evoking that Center toward Whom is drawn "the whole course of events, as the periphery to the center," and toward Whom "converge all the radii of the circle of the ages," the Center described by the nineteenth century Russian saint, Theophan the Recluse? Or must we concur with the sad wisdom of Pliny the Elder, that since "in life everything is in a state of unrest," then "the only certain thing is that nothing is certain and that there is nothing more miserable or arrogant than man."[2] How to draw together the two worlds of Parmenides, the realms of being and appearance, time and eternity, finite and infinite? How to affirm with Heraclitus that within the change and flux and fluttering upon which he dealt at such length, there is yet a unity that draws together all things, and thereby allows us to gather them together in thought and language?

Noumena and Numbers

In his autobiographical account of his boyhood in the Caucasus Mountains, Florensky describes at length the way in which nature everywhere spoke to him, manifested to him its inner life—described what he called "the unusual yet sweetly known and familiar revelation from native deeps" that he found all around him in the rugged canyons and gentle seaside of his native Georgia, and that continued to motivate his studies in mathematics, science, philosophy, and theology even to his final days, during which he occupied himself by studying algae while confined in the merciless Solovetsky Monastery *Gulag* on the White Sea, just below the Arctic Circle.[3] It was not physical nature as such that enthralled and enchanted him, but what he later called the "*Empyrean*"—the divine or heavenly—manifest in the empirical or earthly, and which he associated with the inner reality of things, their noumenal character as they were rooted in the Divine, a rootedness that he came to

[2] *Pillar*, p. 12.

[3] Pavel Florensky, *For My Children*, trans. in Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius*, New York: Continuum, 2010. p. 9. Pyman has an illuminating discussion of Florensky's early essay, "On the Empirical and the Empyrean" on pp. 41—45. Written in 1904, it provides an important prolegomenon to his major work, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, much of which was written by 1908, but which was not published until 1914.

call “Sophia” or Divine Wisdom. And it was through these mysterious conjunctions between two worlds that he first became fascinated with the ontology of the symbol: “All my life I have thought, basically, about one thing: about the relationship of the phenomenon to the noumenon, of its manifestation, its incarnation. It is the question of the *symbol*.”[4] Not surprisingly, then, Florensky came to see his great nemesis in Kant, the philosopher who had, he believed, more than any other led modern thought astray: “The Kantian separation of noumena and phenomena (even when I had no suspicion of the existence of any one of these terms: ‘Kantian,’ ‘separation,’ ‘noumena’ and ‘phenomena’) I rejected with all my being.”[5] Instead, Florensky felt strongly drawn to the tradition of Platonism, which he saw as joining together these two worlds, of showing how the visible made manifest the invisible, and how the invisible shines through the visible.[6] It was, then, to a strongly realist approach to mathematics (in the Platonic sense of “realism” that sees mathematical reality as ontological, rather than empirical or psychological or constructivist) that Florensky was drawn in his earliest studies, and above all to the investigations of Georg Cantor, whom he thanks for his own understanding that “the number is therefore a prototype, an ideal schema, a primary category [both] of thought and of being.”[7]

“For me,” wrote Florensky to his mother at the age of 18, “mathematics is the key to a world view … for which there would be nothing so unimportant as not to be worth studying and nothing that was not linked to something else.”[8] Several years later, he was to write: “My studies of mathematics and physics led me to acknowledge the formal possibility of theoretical foundations for a religious world view for all humanity (the idea of discontinuity, the theory of functions, numbers.)” [9] Most of Florensky’s earliest papers were on mathematics, and a recent critic, S. S. Demidov, has maintained that “without [an] understanding of the significance of mathematics in his method of understanding the world, outside the frame of his opinions on the place of mathematics in the Universe it is impossible adequately to evaluate either his method or his philosophical views.”[10] Florensky was fortunate to study with one of the great Russian mathematicians of the early twentieth century, Nikolai Bugaev, and he is considered by a recent study in English to be (along with Nikolai Luzin and Dimitri Egorov), one of the “trio” of founders of the Russian

[4] Ibid, emphasis added.

[5] Ibid.

[6] “In contrast [to Kant] I was always a Platonist … the appearance was for me always the appearance of the spiritual world” And thus, “the appearance—two-in-one, spiritual-material symbol—was always precious to me in its immediacy.” Florensky, *For My Children*, my own English translation from the German translation: Pawel Floresnki, *Meinen Kindern: Erinnerungen an eine Jugend im Kaukasus*, Stuttgart: Verlag Urachhaus Johannes M. Mayer, 1993, p. 212.

[7] Pawel Florenski, “Die pythagoräischen Zahlen,” in *An den Wasserscheiden des Denkens*, Berlin: Kontext Verlag, 1994, p. 195.

[8] Cited in Pyman, *Quiet Genius*, p. 27.

[9] Ibid, p. 36f.

[10] S. S. Demidov, *“O matematike v tvorchestve P.A. Florenskogo*,” p. 171, cited in *Quiet Genius*, p. 260.

School of Mathematics. In this essay, then, mathematics will serve as a key for understanding some of the central concepts of his greatest work.

The *Pillar and the Ground of the Truth,* consistent with the very task it takes upon itself, can legitimately be read in many ways. It can be approached as a sustained inquiry into the theology of the Christian Trinity, perhaps one of the most important since Chalcedon. It can be read as one of the great philosophical attempts to resolve philosophy's perennial problem of the One and the Many, the Same and the Other. It can be read, as its own subtitle suggests, as an "Orthodox Theodicy," justifying the ways of God to man, by showing the necessity of asceticism and suffering, the ontological grounds of sin, and even the possibility of what he calls "Gehenna" in the ceaseless striving of" bad infinity." But it can also be approached from the direction of formal reasoning, mathematics and logic, as will be done in this paper. From this perspective, it can be read as a sustained assault upon the primacy of the law of identity—a principle that has been taken since Aristotle as the foundation of formal reasoning—an assault that paradoxically employs important concepts of mathematics and logic themselves, such as the concepts of actual and potential infinity, discontinuous functions, the recurrence of antinomies, and the problem of irrational and transcendental numbers. Yet paradoxically, it is only the primacy of the law of identity that Florensky seeks to overthrow, not the law itself. Indeed, he seeks to show that the law of identity is grounded in something deeper and more basic than logic. Just as Heraclitus and Parmenides believed, it is grounded in the nature of being itself when it is understood according to the mode of truth that is proper to it.

The Law of Identity and Its Limitations

It will, perhaps, be useful at the beginning to present a brief and somewhat abstract formulation of Florensky's claims concerning the law of identity. Florensky argues that there are higher and lower versions of the law of identity, one that is ultimately empirical and psychological (and which has been traditionally embraced by logicians) and the other reflecting an ontological understanding, a radically realist understanding, whereby the knower becomes the known in a very important sense, and thus whereby A = A only by means of becoming not-A.[11] Here, the term identity applies to the relation of knower to known, of thinking to being, and not just the relation of the knower to himself. The knowing self (A = A, which for Florensky is

[11] It would not be wrong to see this realism as something anticipated in the anthropologies of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, who both argued that in a very limited sense, the knower and known become united: what is known, in the very act of being known, assumes a new being in the understanding of the knower. But Florensky here is proposing something much more radical—more radical even than Hegel, who understands the self as needing to discover itself through its relation to the other. Rather, for Florensky, the knowing self must unite in love with the known, both in order for meaningful knowledge to take place, and for the self to be a concrete self. It is, one might say, an *erotics* of identity.

ultimately I=I) must go out of itself, leave itself behind and unite with the known, A must become not-A in order to know and thus in order to be itself in more than an abstract sense, i.e. to be itself as a genuine and thus knowing self. And conversely, the not-A that is known, can be known only within this unity of knowing: not-A must become A.

A = A, Florensky argues, is first of all numerical unity, and not simply generic or specific unity. Yet this numerical unity cannot be found in a thing, which exhibits only generic identity, but only in the person who is *himself* self-forming, self-realizing, self-creating. The thing, in contrast, can never be strictly speaking one, for it is merely a member of a larger unity—even if it happens to be the only member. Yet pure self-positing, in the Fichtean sense, is something purely empty, abstract, and ultimately negative. The "this-here-now," immortalized in the first chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit,* is nothing more than the negation of every other this, here, and now, a defensive or combative vacuum that indeed defines itself as a self-identity, but only in an abstract and purely negative way. "In excluding all the other elements, every A is excluded by all of them, for if each of these elements is for A only not-A, then A over against not-A is only not-not-A."[12]

But how, and on what basis, could A go beyond its identity to become one with not-A, I with not-I? How can the self go beyond itself to become one with the other: how does the merely psychological self-identity of self-assertion become the ontological identity that is proper to a person? Here, logic and ontology merge with theology, for the A that is A through becoming not-A is an A that is able to love. And love in this radical sense, Florensky argues, can only be realized through a kind of *askēsis* of the self-contained self, resulting in an openness to its mystical identity with an eternal reality whose very being consists in a dynamic of unity with otherness. And the logical and mathematical principles with which Florensky seeks to undertake this philosophical journey are (1) the concept of discontinuity; (2) the contrast between actual infinity and potential infinity, along with the Absolute Infinity first discussed by Cantor; (3) the antinomies of rationality, and thus the contradictions to which the lower law of identity must lead; and (4) the contrast between generic identity and numerical identity. We will, then, take the last of the principles first, proceeding one by one through the other three until a point is reached at which a brief overview of Florensky's logical-mathematical critique and correction of the law of identity becomes possible.

Modes of Identity

Florensky argues that the neglect and misunderstanding of numerical identity extends back to Latin scholasticism and its logic of terms. Examining the logical works first of Thomas Aquinas and then Francisco Suarez, Florensky finds three modes of identity enumerated: generic, specific, and numerical *(generice, specifice,*

---

[12] *Pillar*, p. 23.

numerice). That is, identity is understood as the negating of division according to genus, according to species, and according to number. It is as if, he argues quoting Suarez, a state of contraction *(status contractionis)* can be observed at work here, in which diversity of genus and species is progressively negated, and finally the size of the class itself is contracted into a singular class: the individual Socrates understood as no more than a class with only one member. But this kind of understanding of identity "remains limited to the category of things," leaving us with merely an impersonal entity that is no more than the shrunken remnant of its own tribe, a general concept identified with itself as a singular class. Strictly speaking, Florensky argues, this is not yet numerical identity at all—not truly one, but still essentially generic and general. For true self-identity to be possible, there must be something else entirely than such a "gradual evolution" from genus to species to the elimination of one member after another until there is only one left, a progression that can never yield more than conceptual, and external, identity. Rather, there must be a break, something new altogether: there must be the self-positing that is possible only from within, and thus only for a person who is not, nor cannot be, subordinated to any class at all.[13] The only beings capable of being numerically (rather than generically or specifically) identical with themselves are persons: "the source of the idea of numerical unity must be sought in the self-identity of consciousness."[14] For "concrete individuals possess *creativity*, are capable of creating absolute, unforeseen relations, which are not part of any group, no matter how large, of already existing relations."[15] Rejecting the gradualism of a smooth, continuous "contraction" of class membership that stays within the realm of things and their properties, Florensky engages here a *discontinuity* that steps beyond thingness altogether, emerging into the identity of a realm of relations that cannot be categorized and grasped through rationality at all, yet which before all conceptual identity posited by reason is always already identifying itself. "A thing is characterized through its *outer unity*, i.e., through the unity of the sum of its features, while a person has his essential character in an *inner unity*, i.e.in the unity of the activity of self-building …. Therefore, the identity of things is established through the identity of concepts, while the identity of a person is established through the unity of his or her self-building or self-positing activity."[16]

The Need for Discontinuity

Florensky argues that numerical identity is founded on consciousness, i.e. on the self-establishing reflexivity that is exclusively characteristic of persons. But this would mean that the law of identity, A = A, is really grounded in self-identity,

[13] *Pillar*, pp. 365–368.

[14] Pillar, p. 60.

[15] Ibid, 374.

[16] Ibid., 59.

I=I. Yet so far, the I=I is confined to simple self-positing: "I am I "means nothing more here than I am not this not-I, nor that not-I, nor yet another not-I, continuing unto a kind of infinity—what Hegel called "bad infinity," the potential infinity or unending etcetera that Florensky argues is characterizes the futility of mere self-identity in its various modes (and about which more will be said later.) I=I is sheer negation, and although it yields an actual (as opposed to merely conceptual) self-identity, it is purely negative, and thus is itself a kind of prison of self-affirmation and self-assertion. At the same time, it is destitute of any positive content of its own, beyond the negation that is entailed in self-assertion. Florensky describes this powerfully in a passage that those unaccustomed to the idea of linking thoughts in logic, metaphysics, psychology, and theology may find somewhat surprising:

> The law A=A becomes a completely empty schema of self-affirmation, a schema that does not synthesize any real elements, anything that is worth connecting with the "=" sign. "I=I" turns out to be nothing more than a cry of naked egotism: "I!" For where there is no difference, there can be no connection. There is therefore only the blind force of stagnation and self-imprisonment, only egotism. Outside of itself, I hates every I, since for it this [other] I is not-I; and hating, I strives to exclude this I from the sphere of being …. Thus, since the naked "now" is a pure zero of content, I hates the whole of its content, i.e., the whole of its life. I turns out to be a dead desert of "here" and "now."[17]

To escape from this "self-imprisonment," something radical must intervene, something incommensurate with, and irreducible to, the monadic self-positing of the I. It would have to break the bonds of the Cartesian *cogito*, which seeks in futility to transcend the bubble of solipsism through concepts alone. And it would also need to be more radical than the Hegelian *Aufhebung* that still, even as it gradually raises the level of development, evolves dialectically along an epistemological and ontological continuum, seeking otherness only to assimilate it into an expanded self-identity. There must be a second discontinuity, a leap traversing an abyss that is even more radical than the first one that led from thinghood to personhood—a *discontinuity* that would lead the self beyond the prison-walls of its own self-assertion (I=I), and thus would lead the law of identity itself beyond the monadism of A = A. Somehow, I must be more than I, and A more than A. And it is here that Florensky's great theme of discontinuity, mentioned already at several points above, assumes decisive importance. If the soul is to ascend beyond self-affirmation, if it is to find life in a "higher, spiritual law of identity, rather than the "lower, fleshly law of identity" which confines it, then this must be "attained not through gradual approach, not through continuous development, but through discontinuous rejection of selfhood."[18] As Kierkegaard had also seen clearly in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Truth cannot be attained through the bad infinity of what he called an endless "approximation process."

Florensky was always grateful to have studied with the great mathematician Nikolai Bugaev at Moscow University. Bugaev sought to build on Cantor's work in set theory, his work on transfinite numbers, and his analysis of the "continuum," as

---

[17] *Pillar*, p. 23.

[18] Pillar, pp. 224f.

a set of points—while himself pursuing research into the mathematics of discontinuous functions—in order to develop a critique of what he believed were the deterministic implications of the concept of continuity, a concept he saw as dominating the mathematical and scientific work of his time. For example, if every continuum is in fact an infinite set of discrete points, then discontinuity is more fundamental than continuity, an insight that he saw as important not just for mathematics, but for metaphysics as well. As Bugaev had written in 1897, "discontinuity is a manifestation of independent individuality and autonomy. Discontinuity intervenes in questions of final causes and ethical and aesthetic problems."[19] Florensky, then, took delight in these famous lectures of Bugaev, which linked the mathematics of discontinuous functions with "excursions in to psychology, into philosophy and ethics," an approach upon which Florensky himself was to build so richly.[20] The concept of discontinuity continued to be crucially important for Florensky throughout this work, and his undergraduate dissertation (for which he received the highest marks) was entitled, "On the Characteristics of Flat Curves as Loci for Breaks in the Continuum."

But Florensky carried both the mathematics and the metaphysics of discontinuity well beyond his teacher. He saw the principle of continuity as the calamitous "governing principle" of nineteenth century thought as a whole, and he believed it was vital to overcome its dominance, which manifested itself in areas as diverse as Marx's philosophy of history, the uniformitarian philosophy of Lyell in geology, and Darwin's view of evolution as proceeding smoothly through a series of gradual small changes. "The cementing idea of continuity," he argued, "brought everything together in one gigantic monolith." [21] Subsequent thought has in fact, as he anticipated, vindicated Florensky on this point, from the post-modern critique of metanarratives such as Marx's, to the discovery of the role of chaos in meteorology and other earth sciences, to the realization of the role of mutations in biology, to the paradoxes of discontinuity in quantum mechanics, to the notion of paradigm shifts in the history and philosophy of science. But at the time the assumption of continuity and gradualism (perhaps a last manifestation of the "great chain of being" assumed in medieval thought) was dominant and everywhere taken for granted. As Florensky put it, "the idea of continuity, making these transitions, took possession of all disciplines from theology to mechanics, and it seemed that anyone who protested against its usurpations was a heretic."[22] Nevertheless, Florensky countered, "inspiration, creativity, freedom, *askēsis*, beauty, the value of the flesh, religion, and much else … stands outside the methods and means of scientific research [as it is currently practiced], for the fundamental presupposition of such methods and means is, of course, the presupposition of connectedness, the presupposition of continuity,

[19] Loren Graham and Jean-Michel Kantor, *Naming Infinity: A True Story of Religious Mysticism and Mathematical Creativity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 2009, p, 68.

[20] *Quiet Genius*, p. 27.

[21] *Naming Infinity*, p. 88.

[22] *Naming Infinity*, p. 88.

gradualness."[23] Yet Florensky sees this bondage to continuity and un-freedom as simply reflecting the limitations of nineteenth century science and mathematics, even as this presupposition was already being left behind through more recent discoveries that pointed instead to the primacy of discontinuity.[24]

Thus, both of the first two letters of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* revolve around one of the greatest of all discontinuities—the discontinuity between life and death. The first letter, discussed already, focuses not just on the melancholy of change and the transitory character of life, but more fundamentally upon the reality of death that underlies them. The endless whirling and fluttering of autumn leaves, "one after another," suggests a kind of slow, spiritual death: the bad infinity of one sin after another, one petty baseness or inattention or cruelty after another scarring the soul, and "gradually crippling it." And "one after another, one after another, like the leaves of autumn, those people whom our heart has come to love forever whirl above the dark chasm. They fall, and there is no return, no possibility of embracing the feet of each of them" so that "now between me and them lies an abyss." This abyss and chasm of death—this discontinuity between life and death that radically breaks with the continuity of decline—poses at the same time the thought of renewal and new life. "It appears that the soul has a foretaste of resurrection in this fluttering," and in this "fragrance of faded aspen groves."[25] Just as the ceaselessly fluttering leaves evoke the longing for a center, so too do the endless truths that correspond to our boundless curiosity suggest our need for a single, central truth. Here we discover within ourselves a hunger not just for "the particular and fragmented human truths, which are unstable and blown about like dust chased by the wind over mountains, but [for] total and eternal Truth, the one Divine Truth, the radiant and celestial Truth."[26] And as will be discussed in a later section, for Florensky this one Truth was not only articulated in Trinitarian theology, but manifest as well in the Absolute Infinity at which Cantor had arrived in his reflections on actual infinity, which both Florensky and Cantor identified with God, and which could never be arrived at through the smooth continuity of a never-ending potential infinity.

But how, through what kind of discontinuity, are we then to approach this Absolute Truth that Florensky identifies as the highest mode of Absolute Infinity? Florensky proposes a preliminary answer in his Second Letter, called simply "Doubt." He begins with the foundational thought of modernity, discovered by Descartes, that "for theoretical thought" the one Truth, its own "Pillar and Ground of the Truth," is *certitude*. (Heidegger, too, would two decades later argue that the transmutation of truth into certitude was a salient character of modernity.) And Florensky analyses the attempts made by the soul hungry for Truth to fulfill this demand for certitude, first through various modes of givenness, which never lead beyond the self-assertion of I=I and A = A discussed already, and secondly by an analysis of the futile attempt of rationality or discursive thought—the endless

[23] *Pillar*, p. 94.

[24] Pillar, pp. 485f; 574.

[25] *Pillar*, p. 11.

[26] Pillar, p. 12.

pursuit of one explanation after another—to arrive at anything more than yet one more truth, which leads to an endless sequence of successive truths, where every A is derived from a not-A, which must in turn be derived from what is not-not-A, and so on. Modern thought, then, leaves us with the choice between "an impenetrable wall and an uncrossable sea, the deadliness of stagnation [in the A=A] and the vanity of unceasing motion [in the endless regression from A to its explanation by not–A]; the obtuseness of the golden calf and the eternal incompletion of the Tower of Babel."[27] In a subtle and complex dialectic that cannot be easily summarized, Florensky proceeds through skepticism and probabilism to a final impasse, in which the *longing* for the Truth, whose light begins to penetrate the darkness of the I=I, lures the seeker into a willingness to go beyond this bubble of self-identity. This self-transcendence would result not just in an endless quest for yet another conceptual not-A, which will in turn become subordinated back into the circle of self-identity, but it would leave the sphere of the I altogether—would break with self-identity in a radically discontinuous movement that is nothing less than, for the I, a death unto itself and to the "lower law of identity," in order to be reborn through the achieving of an impossible identity with what is not-I, discovering in the process a higher, truer law of identity, a "spiritual law of identity."[28] If Parmenides' "untrembling Heart of immutable Truth," and with it the ontological ground of the law of identity, is to be reached, then the path must lead not through the serene, ethereal heights into which *daimonic* charioteers had carried the Eleatic, but through the Garden of Gethsemane.[29]

Consonant with all the great traditions of spirituality, then, Florensky argues that it is only through a kind of intellectual *askēsis* —like the casting-off of all that is cumbersome to the athlete in training, as the word once suggested in the ancient world—that the highest truth can be found. The image upon which Florensky draws here is Abraham, the father of faith, and the father of peoples, who is called to leave behind his ancestral home for an unknown land, a new land, a "better" and indeed "divine" country.[30] Likewise, the knower must leave behind his own self-identity, leave behind the law of identity itself, cross over the abyss of rationality and go out to another—another who cannot be proved, because He is Himself a "self-proving Subject," which alone could be Absolute Truth.[31] Moreover, this "going out" must at the same time be an "entering in," an ontological union with the Truth who alone can be considered as "*actual infinity*, the Infinite conceived as integral Unity, as one Subject complete in itself."[32] Thus, "the act of knowing is not only a gnoseological act but also an ontological act, not only ideal but real. Knowing is a real *going* of the

[27] *Pillar*, pp. 26f.

[28] *Pillar*, p. 348.

[29] *Pillar*, p. 45.

[30] *Pillar*, p. 55; Heb. 11:8, 14–15.

[31] Pillar, pp. 33ff.

[32] Pillar, p. 33.

knower *out* of himself, or (what is the same thing) a real going of what is known into the knower, a real unification of the knower and what is known."[33]

But this is to say that knowing is itself a mode of love: "in love and only in love is real knowledge of the Truth conceivable."[34] "Love takes the monad out of itself" and "unity in love is that which takes each monad out of the state of pure potentiality, i.e. spiritual sleep, spiritual emptiness, and amorphous chaos."[35] And in knowing (and loving) Absolute Truth, which is related to every individual truth as actual infinity is to every finite element—as including them, without being contained by them—it is possible to then know (and love) finite things as well, within that Absolute. "Knowing is not the capturing of a dead object by a predatory subject of knowledge, but a living moral communion of persons, each serving for each as both object and subject. Strictly speaking, only a person is known and only by a person."[36] Hence, in a manner entirely different from the way it is argued by either Augustine or Spinoza, every truth known is a truth known about God. But, rather than God being dissolved into the world, or lending his archetypes to it, the world is itself personalized within the God whose very energies it manifests, yet who nevertheless essentially transcends it. "God is transcendental for the world, but the world is not transcendental for God: rather it is wholly permeated with divine energies."[37] Therefore, this mode of knowing that frees the self from its own self-imprisonment, that is itself a mode of love allowing every truth to entail a personal relation to God, is possible only because in each case the initiative always already proceeds from God. "God's love goes over to us," and indeed, it is this divine love itself that has lured the self beyond itself, enticed the I to find itself in unity with the not-I.[38]

Happily, however, we need not somehow plunge into mystical unity with God all at once, and with no preparation. There are certain modes of knowing within which we are offered an anticipation, a preparation—nothing less than a "preliminary hint … of the heavenly in the earthly":

> This revelation occurs in the personal, sincere love of two, in friendship, when to the loving one is given—in a preliminary way, without *askēsis*—the power to overcome his self-identity, to remove the boundaries of his I, to transcend himself, and to acquire his own I in the I of another, a Friend. Friendship, as the mysterious birth of *Thou*, is the environment in which the revelation of the Truth begins.[39] (PG *283*)

Crossing the abyss, making the leap, entering into this radical discontinuity, going from the life that is a kind of death, the empty self-identity of the I = I, into a death (I = not-I) that is a kind of life, the soul discovers a "new" self, finds the truth that only by losing oneself can ones self be found. But once again, we need not think

---

[33] *Pillar*, p. 55.

[34] *Pillar*, p. 56.

[35] *Pillar*, p. 236.

[36] *Pillar*, pp. 55f.

[37] *Pillar*, p. 363.

[38] *Pillar*, pp. 56f.

[39] *Pillar*, p. 283.

that this discontinuous exit from the monadic hegemony of self-identity necessarily requires some dark night of the soul, an anguished state of mystical longing such as we find in some of the Western mystics. It can take place, to some degree, in the moment when some wisp of cloud, or an ancient scent lingering in the autumn air, or the song of a mocking bird in the calm depths of a Southern night, penetrates our shell and moves us beyond and outside ourselves, i.e. the moment in which we, however briefly, embody "the act by means of which a creature is liberated from its selfhood and goes out of itself."[40] We are made, Florensky argues in harmony with Patristic Christianity, in the image of God. And thus, remarkably, "to love visible creatures is to allow the received Divine energy to reveal itself—through the receiver, outside and around the receiver—in the same way that it acts in the Trihypostatic Divinity itself. It is to allow this energy to go over to another, to a brother."[41]

The Uses of Contradiction

It would be a mistake, however, to see Florensky's critique of the law of identity as a form of irrationalism, similar either to those of Breton and Duchamp in France, or to those articulated by his Russian contemporary Lev Shestov and his admirer, D.H. Lawrence. Florensky was first of all a mathematician and scientist, and long after his philosophical voice was silenced, he continued his work in these fields, even during his last years in the Gulag collecting specimens of local flora for his experiments. Rather, Florensky is appealing to a distinction and contrast that goes back to ancient Greek philosophy—and which was important to his Slavophile predecessors such as Khomyakov—between lower and a higher modes of knowing, between *dianoia* and *nous*, between what Florensky terms in Russian *rassudok* or "rationality" and *razum* or "reason," or between discursive rationality, which seeks to explain conceptually, and what German Idealism called intellectual intuition, which grasps higher truths through non-sensuous immediacy.[42] While the former is fragmented and divisive, the latter is integral and unifying, drawing people together into a kind of loving concord that in Russian is called *sobornost*.[43] And while "rationality" insists upon the "lower" law of identity, "reason" transcends it and operates according to a "higher," spiritual law of identity.

Kant, of course, argued that such intellectual intuition was impossible for human beings, employing a series of antinomies—equally compelling arguments supporting contradictory conclusions, which arise when human understanding tries to go beyond the limits of empirical experience—to show the paradoxes resulting from attempts at a higher kind of knowledge. Yet something on the order of *nous* or

[40] *Pillar*, p. 235.
[41] *Pillar*, p. 62.
[42] *Pilllar*, p. 7.
[43] *Pillar*, p. 430.

theōria or *contemplatio* (or intellectual intuition) has until modernity been seen by philosophers as the highest and truest mode of knowing, from Parmenides to the Middle Ages. In his retrieval of *noēsis* through *askēsis* and the experience of religious mystery, Florensky shows just how deeply the roots of patristic epistemology extend into ancient Greek philosophy, which characteristically (and notably in Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus) saw noetic rationality as the fulfillment of the human condition, the mode in which (however they articulated it) human beings could come closest to the divine—yet one that for the ancient philosophers for the most part merely flickered on the horizon, attainable if at all only for a few, and only then for brief periods. And indeed, modernity itself may be defined by its very rejection of noetic or contemplative knowledge, this purportedly direct or immediate apprehension or intuition of higher, eternal, transcendent realities, which traditional, patristic Christianity saw as the birthright of all the faithful who undertook the *askēsis* of the *ekklesia*, the ancient Christian community.

Florensky, then, may be seen as undertaking the most significant attempt to justify this putatively higher rationality since the German Idealists had sought to overcome Kant's attempt to establish limits for human knowledge. But just as Feuerbach and Marx saw the need to go beyond German Idealism not within theory, but through an exodus from theory into praxis, so too (in a very different mode) Florensky also seeks to justify higher knowledge through something active and engaging—through experience, and through the love that takes the knower beyond the bounds of self-identity and the law of identity itself, i.e. through an ontological migration from self-identity to identity with the other.

How to activate or engender this higher mode of reason? In Book VII of the Republic, Plato had posed the question of what "*would be apt to summon or stimulate noetic activity*" (523e)[44] And Socrates here engages his interlocutor Glaucon with a strange exercise, asking him to hold up his fourth (ring) and fifth (little) finger, and report whether the fourth finger is little or small, to which he answers that it is large. Next, he asks Glaucon to hold up his third (middle) and fourth fingers, upon which Glaucon reports that the same finger, the fourth, has now become little. The same thing, the fourth finger, is thus both itself and not itself, both big and small. And this contradiction in the visible realm, this perceptual antinomy—and this encounter with what Plato in his later philosophy called the indeterminate dyad—is precisely what he maintains is able to stimulate and awaken the noetic intellect to go beyond the visible toward what is intelligible, but not visible: to make the transition from one world to another. Likewise, Florensky takes the concept of antinomy, which to Kant was a warning sign beyond which we must not advance, as in fact a spur to awaken our noetic powers.

"Rationality," clinging to the illusory safety of the I=I and the law of identity, must undergo the discipline of *askēsis*: the rationalistic mind must be "tamed," i.e. it must forgo its own pretensions to absoluteness, in order to arrive at a genuine

[44] *The Republic of Plato*, trans Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books) 1968. p. 202. Translation altered.

Absolute.[45] And it is precisely the great antinomies or mysteries of religion upon which this discipline and taming must be exercised: "The mysteries of religion are not secrets that one must not reveal. They are not the passwords of conspirators, but inexpressible, unutterable, indescribable experiences, which cannot be put into words except in the form of contradictions, which are 'yes' and 'no' at the same time."[46] Thus, when these mysteries of religious experience are put into words, they become antinomies embracing both thesis and antithesis—or to use a word that for Florensky is synonymous with religious antinomy, they become *dogmas*.

The basis of dogma would thus be not some kind of mandate based on "blind faith," but quite the opposite: dogma would in this case derive from the "mind's eye," or rather "that eye by which mankind looks at the inaccessible light of ineffable Divine glory," but stated in conceptual language.[47] Moreover, we should expect *beforehand* that whenever these mysteries and this noetic experience are translated into conceptual language, the discourse of rationality, the result will necessarily be manifest as an antinomy. And indeed, it is just this antinomic character that should stimulate rationality to purify and discipline itself, in order to arrive at "living religious experience as the sole legitimate way to gain knowledge of the dogmas."[48] The usual proofs for the existence of God and all the other attempts to create what Florensky sees as the absurdity of a "rational faith" would thus be proceeding in precisely the wrong direction. "So-called 'rational faith,' faith with rational proofs … is a harsh, cruel stony growth in the heart, which keeps the heart from God." Rather, "the truth is known only through itself."[49] Even the very "existence of Truth" is "not deducible but only demonstrable in experience.

What are examples of such dogmas that invite the soul to proceed beyond the safety of its own self-identity? Surely, and above all, we must list the dogma of the Self-proving Subject, the Trihypostatic Unity which through the unity of its own embrace of otherness with itself, invites us into the very loving dynamic which has been the ontological mode of God from eternity. But there are more accessible examples, and Florensky cites many of them in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth.* There is, for example, what he calls the antinomy of *philia* and *agape*, that salvation is esoteric and for the elect, *and* that it is open to everyone. Or that one should "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15) *while at the same time* "neither cast ye your pearls before swine" (Mt 7:6). [50] Or there is the great antinomy of faith and works, i.e. "between God's grace and human *askēsis*."[51] Indeed, sometimes the antinomy is presented in a single passage (Phil. 2:12–2:13) of scripture: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (the thesis) "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his pleasure" (the antithesis). Or the antinomy

[45] *Pillar*, pp. 7, 23.

[46] *Pillar*, p. 117.

[47] *Pillar*, p. 79.

[48] *Pillar*, p. 5.

[49] *Pillar*, p. 48.

[50] *Pillar*, pp. 300f; see also pp. 295f.

[51] *Pillar*, p. 255.

may reveal itself within a few pages of a single Gospel: "For judgment I come into the world" (John 9:39) and ""I come not to judge the world" (John 12: 47). Or we may consider the Orthodox Divine Liturgy, in which the priest holds up the holy mysteries that will soon be offered to the faithful and proclaims "the holy things are for the holy," but to which the response from chanter or choir is "One is holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father, Amen." Thesis and antithesis must both be embraced simultaneously, not through conceptual explanation, but through rising to the kind of noetic experience and practice to which these binary realities in each case point.

Again, Florensky's affinity for paradox, first honed in his work with the paradoxes of infinity around which so much of Cantor's work revolves, is pivotal in his theological and philosophical insights here. One of the most important appendices of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* discusses how the problem of irrational numbers, long dismissed as "fictitious numbers" and "*numeri surdi,*" propel us to break through and leave behind the "circle of operations which arithmetic knows … in order to be born into a new, hitherto unseen and unthought of world."[52] This is, he argues, the world of actual infinity, entered through the portals of the paradoxes generated by the juxtaposition of the finite and the infinite, effecting "a leap, a discontinuity in development." These insights into the role of paradox, contradiction, and antinomy cast new light upon Christ's use of *parables* in his teaching, which usually entail an antinomy, a set of opposing insights that must both be embraced. They allow Florensky important insights into the relation between these two modes of rationality themselves, while aligning him against the lower, one-dimensional rationality of modernity, and alongside traditional religious discourse, such as is common not only in the enigmatic paradoxes of Taoism, Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sufism, but above all in the splendid paradoxes evoked by so many of the great Orthodox *Kontakia* and *Stichera*, especially those celebrating its holiest feast days, each of which centers upon a paradox: "Thou hast dwelt in a cave, and hast lain down in a manger, O thou whose throne is in heaven …. The Unseen is seen, the Untouchable is touched, the Beginningless beginneth"; "He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the Cross … He who wraps the heaven in clouds is wrapped in the purple of mockery."[53]

But when it encounters this antithetical character of dogma, being foreign to the experience that engenders and underlies it, "the rational mind involuntarily shudders," for it senses "that it is required to sacrifice itself."[54] Rationality does not have the taste or the capacity to bring together thesis and antithesis, for "only religious experience apprehends antinomies and sees how their reconciliation is possible."[55]

---

[52] *Pillar*, p. 362.

[53] *Divine Prayers and Services of the Catholic Orthodox Church of Christ*, ed. Rev. Seraphim Nassar, Englewood, NJ: Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, 1993, pp. 411f; *The Lenten Triodion,* trans. Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, South Canaan, PA: St Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1999, p. 609.

[54] Pillar, p. 121.

[55] *Pillar*, p. 120.

Rather, in its refusal to go beyond the security of its own self-identity, rationality clings to one side or another of the religious antithesis—"a one-sided proposition takes the place of absolute Truth, and such a proposition thus excludes everything in which is seen the antinomic complement to the given half of the antinomy, rationally incomprehensible." The Greek word for choice is *airesis*, which came to mean "one-sidedness," and which forms the root of the English word "heresy." Thus, choosing one side or the other, thesis or antithesis, this one-sidedness of rationality is necessarily sectarian, "heretical," or one-sided: "a heresy, even a mystical one, is a rational one-sidedness that claims to be everything."[56]

From Actual Infinity to Absolute Infinity

Surely the greatest paradox discovered by Cantor, and doubtless the one that meant the most to him, as it did to Florensky after him, was that there were higher and lower orders of infinity, leading up to an absolute infinity that exceeds comprehension altogether, and that both men identified with God. Once Cantor began to take seriously the concept of actual infinity, as opposed to the merely potential infinity familiar from the paradoxes of Zeno and the ordinary concept of endless iteration, the paradoxical notion of a hierarchy of infinities began to pose itself—paradoxical, because it would seem that infinity is something that cannot be exceeded. And yet he came to understand that there was, for example, a lower infinity of the integers, and then a higher infinity of the integers plus all the rational and algebraic numbers. Beyond this was a yet higher infinity of what he called transfinite numbers, those irrational numbers (such as "Pi") that were not algebraic (i.e. capable of being designated by a formula, such as "the square root of two"), and whose infinite number so far exceeded all the preceding infinite sets taken together that the ratio had to be rounded to 1—i.e. if the rational and algebraic numbers were mixed together with the transcendental numbers, the probability of randomly choosing a transcendental number would be one, and the probability of choosing one of the infinite number of integers, or one of the infinite number of rational fractions, or one of the infinite number of algebraic numbers would be zero! [57] And of course, the movement from a lower infinity to a higher one is necessarily *discontinuous*.

Yet the infinity of the transcendental numbers still did not stand at the top of the hierarchy. For Cantor, to whom Florensky refers to as "the founder of the modern theory of actual infinity," the realization that there were a hierarchy of infinities—at the pinnacle of which was what he variously understood as the "set of all sets," or "the totality of everything conceivable"— led him to an absolute limit to mathematical understanding, something that "cannot be known, not even approximately," and which he called absolute infinity, or simply "the Absolute," and sometimes compared

[56] *Pillar*, p. 119.

[57] Amir D. Aczel, *The Mystery of the Aleph: Mathematics, the Kabbalah, and the Search for Infinity*, New York: Washington Square Press, 2000., pp. 90, 132.

to the "One" of Plotinus.[58] Thus, for Cantor, this Absolute was by no means an abstraction, but rather that which was most real of all: "it is the single, completely individual unity in which everything is included, which includes the Absolute, incomprehensible to the human understanding. This is the *Actus Purissimus,* which by many is called God."[59]

Perhaps Cantor was himself a mystic, having not merely arrived mathematically at the incomprehensible concept of this Absolute that he called "God," but had in some sense encountered this reality in experience. But it is clear that Florensky's main innovations beyond Cantor were (a) to show a path not just theoretically, but within religious experience to this Absolute, and (b) to show that this Absolute Infinity could only be grasped, by employing the higher rationality discussed above, as Trihypostatic Unity and Self-Proving Subject, i.e. as the Trinitarian God of Patristic Christianity and Orthodox Faith. It is one of Florensky's main theses that there are ultimately only two choices: *either* the endless futility and hopeless despair of the "bad infinity," i.e. the *potential infinity* that ceaselessly seeks what it can never have—the central dynamic of torment to many of the figures in Dante's *Inferno—or* ecstatic fulfillment of the search for Truth in the actual infinite, ecstatic because it entails a "going beyond" itself for rationality and self-identity, or in theological terms, a *kenōsis* or self-emptying, the sacrificing or abandonment of oneself that makes possible a new, and higher kind of existence. But is there an actual infinity, let alone a hierarchy of actual infinities? And if so, what character would this highest order of infinity possess? Finally, through what path could experience arrive at the highest level of actual infinity?

Florensky's answer to these three questions is extraordinarily rich and complex, and can only be addressed in outline here, although it should be possible to at least sketch out an answer to them, for they will help illumine the other main topics of this paper (the law of identity, discontinuity, and antinomy). First, Florensky makes some very simple observations concerning what he regards as "the fundamental and wholly elementary distinction between *actual* and *potential infinity*," a distinction that he feels has recently suffered from error and neglect.[60] Both potential and actual infinity are quanta, comparable to other kinds of quantum. But potential infinity is a *variable quantum*, changing in relation to any other quantum with which it may be compared, since by definition it must exceed any given quantum. Thus, potential infinity is not a specific quantum at all, but simply "a special way of considering a quantum," i.e. that it is indefinitely variable. Thus, potential infinity is not something actual, but an *ens rationis*, an entity posited by rationality. Its infinite character never actually exists, but is always variable, in process, underway, and thus it is never fully itself. It is what the ancient Greeks called the *apeiron* and viewed disparagingly, and what German Idealism called *schlechte Unendlichkeit,* "bad infinity,' the infinity of the ceaseless "etcetera." And as we have seen already, Florensky

---

[58] *Pillar*, p. 574; *Naming Infinity*, pp. 55, 95.

[59] From one of Cantor's last letters to the English mathematician Grace Chisholm Young, cited in *Mystery*, p. 189.

[60] *Pillar*, p. 351.

associated this with the endlessness of desire and dissatisfaction, of unsatisfied striving, of a movement that can never achieve its goal and for which it is impossible to ever find peace—for as soon as it varies to exceed one quantum, there remain endless greater quanta which it must still exceed.[61]

Actual infinity, in contrast, is complete in itself, and thus is not a variable quantum at all, but a *constant quantum.* It is always already fulfilled, fully itself. As a simple example, we may take the set of all points inside a certain closed figure, such as a circle or square. Since the figure is bounded, the number or points within it is complete and constant, fully determinate, rather than variable. Yet it is at the same time infinite, since the number of points exceeds each of the numbers in the series 1, 2, 3, …, n … and is greater than them. It is, then, an actual infinite. Or, to give a more theologically significant example, "we can say that the powerfulness of God is actually infinite, because it, being determinate (in God there is no change), at the same time is greater than all finite powerfulness."[62] Moreover, Florensky adds, the concept of actual infinity is more basic than that of potential infinity. For in order for potential infinity to be possible, there must be an already infinite domain within which its ceaseless variations can endlessly proceed. That is, *"every potential infinity already presupposes the existence of an actual infinity as its super-finite limit.*"[63] Moreover, it is important to observe that no actual infinity can be gradually reached through the variation process of potential infinity, for between actual infinity and the infinite increase of a quantum that we consider potentially infinite, there is a radical *discontinuity*—not necessarily unreachable, but certainly not attainable through increase along a progressive continuum, which could only aspire "farther and farther, without ever being able to achieve a synthesis and to find peace in the whole."[64]

Now we may return to the *aporia* discussed earlier between givenness and discursion, neither of which alone could provide a successful path toward Truth, leaving us with the dilemma of choosing between the lifeless desert of the here and now, which intuition offers, and the torment and bad infinity of endless explanation, which never arrives at its goal—between the egoistic assertion of a particular givenness, certain merely because it is *my* givenness, and the ceaseless discursivity that continually seeks to explain every A by some new not-A, i.e. between the law of identity and the law of sufficient reason. Yet Absolute Truth would somehow need to possess both characters. On the one hand, if it is to be experienced, it must be *given* in experience, arrived at by *finite intuition.* But if it is to be more than arbitrarily asserted, it must be exhaustively explained, and the grounds for it as a judgment absolutely proved, and this could only be possible not through a potentially infinite process, but within the actual infinity of an already completed *infinite discursion*.

Absolute Truth, then, would need to be both finite infinity and infinite finitude, both actually infinite in having already synthesized its grounds, and at the same time

---

[61] *Pillar*, pp. 351f.

[62] *Pillar*, p. 353.

[63] Ibid, italics in original.

[64] Ibid.

capable of being intuited as a given, i.e. it must be a "unity of opposites, *coincidentia opositorum*."[65] Moreover, since finite discursion cannot itself provide for it the actually infinite synthesis of all its grounds, Absolute Truth would have to be self-proving or self-grounding, a feature that we saw earlier (in the discussion of numerical identity) is characteristic only of a person or *subject*. Absolute Truth, then, if it exists, would be our experience of an Absolute Self-Proving Subject. And we have seen already how the *kenōsis* that leads beyond self-identity and the *askēsis* that leads beyond rationality open the self for the experience of such a Self-Proving Subject. But is there such a reality? Florensky is clear that this must be discerned through ascetic experience alone: the Truth cannot be known beforehand, nor can it even be known for sure whether it exists, but rather it must be encountered in experience. He is able to show only that there must be such a Self-Proving Subject if there is to be not just truth, but the Truth; for in the same way that actual infinity provides the domain for potential infinity, Truth would itself be necessary even for a single finite truth to be possible. Thus, Florensky concludes, "rationality is possible not in itself but through the object of its thought, and if, and only if, it has an object of thought in which both contradictory laws of its activity, i.e. the law of identity and the law of sufficient reason, coincide." And in addition, we must add that "rationality is possible if Absolute Actual Infinity is given to it. But what is this Infinity? It turns out that such an Object of thought, making thought possible, is the Trihypostatic Unity."[66]

But we may carry this yet another step further. To be fully a subject, such an Absolute subject would have to go beyond itself, to enter in love into another: "this Subject is such that it is A and not-A."[67] Let us, then, designate this not-A as B. But what is B? B too must go out from itself, transcend itself, in order to be a personal reality. But if B is merely not-A, then its going over in love to not-not-A would end up with the result that A has never really left itself at all, i.e. with A returning to itself. For if A = B, and if B = A, then we have not left the solipsistic self-identity of A = A. Thus, B must be something more than not-A, which we can designate as C. But here, Florensky concludes, "through C the circle can be closed, for in its 'other,' in [B understood as] not-C, A finds itself as A. In B ceasing to be A, [i.e. through B finding a not-B which is not simply A] A receives itself mediately from another, but not through the one with which it is equated, i.e., [it receives itself] from C. And here it receives itself as already 'proved,' already established. The same thing goes for each of the subjects A, B, C of the triple relationship."[68] Or, as he summarizes, "Truth is the contemplation of Oneself through Another in a Third: Father, Son, and Spirit."[69] But this contemplation is far from being a lifeless,

[65] *Pillar*, p. 33.

[66] *Pillar*, p. 347. For Florensky's discussion of the *Absolutum* in Georg Cantor's work, see *Pillar*, p. 354.

[67] Pillar, p. 36.

[68] *Pillar*, p. 36.

[69] *Pillar*, p. 37. Florensky offers a detailed comparison between the Christian understanding of Triunity and the views found in non-Christian religions, such as the Hindu triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, on pp. 478–482.

bloodless "theoretical" state. Rather, "Absolute Truth is known in love"—not in love as a psychological condition but love as a metaphysical act, the love that makes possible the leap beyond the bad infinity of self-identity into the actual infinity of ontological communion.[70] Thus, Florensky has shown a path whereby experience itself can "go beyond rationality, to enter the domain where rationality with all its norms is rooted."[71]

The First Nicene Council, which established the initial and guiding understanding of Christian thought, can be seen as primarily the search for the right word, a word that Florensky takes as central for his entire mathematical-philosophical-theological project. For the Greek word upon which the great Nicene Council of 318 finally settled as its cornerstone—the foundational word of Patristic Christianity and the fundamental word for this identity of substance (*ousia*) that is constitutive of personhood—is *homoousios*, "of one substance," or "consubstantial." It is for Florenksy the true Principle of Identity, not the impoverished and paranoid self-identity of I=I, but the fulfilled, peaceful identity between Same and Other by way of a Third. If he is right, it is the great, foundational principle of ontology. "It is impossible," exclaims Florensky here, "to mention without reverent fear and holy trepidation that moment—infinitely significant and unique in its philosophical and dogmatic importance—when the thunder of *Homoousios* first roared over the City of Victory [i.e. Ancient Nikea, City of *Nike*]."[72] Thus, Patristic Christianity can be seen, and indeed was seen by many of the Church Fathers (such as the Alexandrians and the Cappadocians) who were well versed in Greek philosophy, as offering the solution to what is arguably the great unsolved philosophical problem of antiquity: as articulated in Plato's *Sophist*, it is the problem resolving the unstable relationship between the Same and the Other, without ending up in the state of perpetual warfare entailed by dualism, or the state of inescapable totality entailed by monism. Moreover, it demonstrates the ontological identity between thought and being that was sought and posited by both Heraclitus and Parmenides, through the experience of the Love of the Persons of the Trinity for one another, by means of the grace-given identity with the very dynamic of that love itself. And this would, at the same time, be the experience of the identity between Reason and Truth, between thought and being, between God and humanity, between the world of fluttering leaves and the Center toward which they, along with all things, are drawn. As Florensky writes in his concluding paragraph, "The Triune Truth Itself does for us what for us is impossible. The Trihypostatic Truth Itself draws us to Itself."[73]

70 *Pillar*, p. 67.

71 *Pillar*, p. 44.

72 *Pillar*, p. 41.

73 *Pillar*, p. 348.

Part V
Higher Education and Western Culture

The primary concern of this book has been to work toward a certain opening or clearing within which the interaction between visible and invisible, earth and heaven, created and uncreated, secular and sacred can come into contact with one another—or rather, by means of which the former can open up to the healing, the wholeness, the holiness of the latter. Although he understands these terms rather differently, I believe that Heidegger is sound in maintaining that it is the clearing (*Lichtung*)—i.e. the event of unconcealing and opening-up that the ancient Greeks called *alētheia* or truth—that makes possible a *world* that is habitable, i.e. that could once again become meaningful after the long drought of modern nihilism. Such a clearing, however, is never something to be taken for granted, like air and sunlight (which themselves can no longer be assumed) but rather is always the result of that interplay between terms that constitutes culture in its most genuine sense. And if today we live in a wasteland devoid of shared meaning, where the attempt to make sense of things has become a largely private affair, then it is a sign that to this very extent we live without a culture of our own. Nowhere is this lack more apparent than in the contemporary university, which is increasingly one-dimensional, having relegating the business of truth to the sciences and their applied fields, which themselves (as argued earlier in this book) necessarily proceed from a basis of methodological atheism, i.e. a one-dimensional "naturalism" in the philosophical sense, in which any interplay between nature and transcendence, heaven and earth, has been precluded beforehand. Chapter Seventeen argues that the one-dimensional university, where the sacred has been thoroughly marginalized, if not banished altogether, has defaulted from the task of preserving the culture that was its charge to defend. Chapter Eighteen, in turn, first presented at a conference exploring the possibility of establishing a truly Orthodox college in North America, questions how this interplay of terms were once canonical in the West. Both chapters, however,

seek to address the same problem: that the modern university has become a place where the incursions that form the subject matter of this book can no longer take place, or indeed even be acknowledged as having once taken place.

Chapter Eighteen One-Dimensional Learning: The Dialectic of Sacred and Secular as the Enduring Possibility of the University

Science and academia had [by the nineteenth century] lost their old ecclesiastical or theological foundations as part of this transformation. Religion should now concern an academic or scientist only in their private persona, thus not qua academic or scientist. An academic or scientist now embodied a disinterested professional persona. In this sense, academia first lost its theological, transcendental mission in the Enlightenment.

William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*

Disentangling the visible from the invisible made it "inhuman" in our minds, by reducing it to mere matter. At the same time, this made it appear capable of being wholly adapted to humans, malleable in every aspect and open to unlimited appropriation.

Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*

A university is imaginative or it is nothing—at least nothing very useful.

Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education*

The world of imagination is the world of eternity.

William Blake, *Prose Fragments*

Three Moments of University Development: The Metaphysical Rivalry of Transcendence and Immanence

The beginnings of the university can be found long before the medieval era in which its rise is usually situated. Its gradual emergence can best be understood as having taken place in two successive moments of history, the first unique to ancient Greece, and a second in which this initial moment was itself recapitulated in similar ways within three different religious traditions: first in the Byzantine world, then in the Islamic, and finally in the Latin Middle Ages. The most critical threat to its

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019
B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_18

continued flourishing, it will be argued, comes within a third moment, asymmetrical with the first two, that has been underway for several centuries.

Both of the first two initiatory moments exhibit an interplay between the secular and sacred. In the *first*, taking place in ancient Greece, an indigenous, sacred, polytheistic tradition of great power and beauty, but at the same time chronic disorder and incoherence, gave birth to a more reflective, more secular order that retained, and indeed elevated, many of its central ideas and intuitions, while seeking an underlying principle of unity. In this first moment, an essentially sacred order (pagan religion) was put into a more secular form, one that nevertheless retained its roots in the sacred. One might think here of Parmenides' mystical ascent to truth and being, Plato's ascent to the One, and Aristotle's *nous* as a participation in the life of the Unmoved Mover as essentially sacred themes cut loose from conventional religious belief or practice. All three can be seen as largely secular redactions of religious, and even mystical, themes involving the ascent to a higher realm and an accompanying illumination. A higher unity is sought, but only at the expense of a movement away from the particular and fragmentary, with the higher realm of "forms" or "essences" replacing the gods and goddesses, and mediating some yet higher, ultimate unity.

In Plato, for example, as illustrated by his "divided line" and sun analogies in the *Republic*, one moves from images to things, from things to models, from models to forms, and from forms to a higher unity called "the Good," and in other works "the One" and "the Same." The ascending movement proceeds away from particulars, and the relation of the One to the Many is indirect and several levels removed, remote and opaque from within the many-faceted world we inhabit. This interplay of secular and sacred moments, of cultural immanence and transcendence, allowed for the rise of diverse "schools" of philosophy, but these were not yet universities composed of diverse faculties, since an underlying basis for different faculties was yet to be established. The exemplary representative of this initial anticipation of the university, then, is the Academy of Athens, founded by Plato and operating for nearly a thousand years, along with subsequent philosophical schools in other important cultural centers such as Alexandria.

The unifying basis that the university required was to fully emerge only in the *second moment*, whereby a newly comprehensive, overarching principle of unity was established, which at the same time drew that unity back into relation to the particular and everyday: in the monotheistic worldviews of Byzantine Christianity (The University of Constantinople, in 425), Islam (Qarawiyin University in Fez, 859, followed by al-Azhar University in Cairo, 969), and somewhat later in Latin Christendom (with Universities such as Bologna, Paris, and Oxford taking shape in the 11th and 12th centuries) where universities traced their lineage from the purely ecclesiastical monastic schools and cathedral schools established during the ninth century Carolingian Renaissance. The cultural and intellectual syntheses upon which these civilizations were based were not only strongly theological, but in each case claimed for themselves upon that basis a universality that extended inclusively, not just to all humanity, but to the farthest reaches of the "*uni-verse*." Nor were these three cultural iterations of universality and university seen as mutually exclusive, even though they were to some extent competitive with one another, for universities

in one cultural sphere acknowledged the underlying legitimacy of those in the others, and not infrequently hosted visiting scholars.[1]

The concept of the *uni-versity*, then, required a theological vision of *un-iversality* to bring together diverse disciplines and diverse faculties under one cohesive vision of learning, corresponding to the unity of the cosmos as it could thus be understood as created, ruled, and maintained within an intelligible order by a single God, rather than a variety of tribal, cultic, and ethnic deities, and thus a multiplicity of organizing principles. The necessary presupposition for the university was the concept of a single God who was understood as creator and ruler of the whole universe: transcendent, yet sovereign over all, and in an important sense discernable and intelligible within all. In this second moment, then, a partially secularized order (pagan philosophy) was successively combined with insights and sensibilities from the three great Abrahamic faith traditions.[2] Perhaps the most striking intellectual marker of this simultaneous assimilation and transformation is that in which first Platonism, then Stoicism (with its equation of *Logos* and *Physis* with *Theos*), and eventually Arisotelianism, were respectively assimilated into these theological currents of thought, resulting in the great traditions of Byzantine, Jewish, Islamic, and Latin philosophy that even today are normative within their respective spheres.

It was, then, this metaphysical unity of a single, almighty creator—and its epistemological correlate of the project of a unified body of knowledge that would draw together diverse kinds of studies, following from the attempt to know creation in a way at least weakly analogous to the way the creator knows it—that allowed for the curricular unity of the different university faculties in the medieval period. Grounded in the ultimate mystery of a transcendent creator, theology as a unifying principle at the same time allowed and encouraged different disciplinary articulations of the relation of God to creation, their very diversity serving to exhibit the glory of the creator. At the same time, at its heart lay the attempt to assimilate much of the wealth of ancient, secular culture into a unified, theological vision. And perhaps above all, theology was the foundation for what Robert Nisbet called the "dogma" of the university, viz. the shared conviction that learning is worthwhile "for its own sake."[3] For only if knowledge of "what is" turns out to be revelatory of the one Creator of all that is, does it have this inherently valuable status, without which it would offer no more than either random bits of information, slipshod additions to a randomly waxing aggregate of facts, or else purely instrumental knowledge bound rigidly to its application. Moreover, this view that knowledge of the universe as a

[1] Indeed, Haskins notes that the stimulus for the rise of the Latin universities came largely from exchanges with the Islamic scholars of Spain and the Byzantine scholars of Greece, with whom Sicilian centers of learning such as Salerno had remained in contact. Charles Homer Haskins, *The Rise of the Universities* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press:1957), pp. 4–6.

[2] Although it remained a minority culture, Judaism, together with Christianity and Islam, contributed importantly to this second moment, and Jewish scholars played prominent roles in all three dominant cultures: Byzantine, Islamic, and Latin.

[3] Robert A. Nisbet, *The Degradation of the Academic Dogma: The University in America*, New York, Basic Books, 1971. The notion that the university must pursue knowledge for its own sake had been earlier emphasized in Newman's *Idea of the University.*

created order gives insight into its creator, that even seemingly insignificant and lowly things offer us an understanding of the divine order within which they are rooted, subverts the rigidly hierarchical view held by Plato, and to a lesser extent Aristotle as well, that the knowledge of lowly things such as plants and insects—and to some degree human beings as well—had little value, compared to metaphysically higher beings, such as the heavenly bodies.

Yet in the Latin West this inclusive principle of unity within the university began to falter as modernity started to emerge under a new secularization, one that saw itself as heir and even recapitulation of the first secularization, i.e. the one that had taken place with the ancient Greeks. Unfolding during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, this *third moment* initially tried to assimilate the sacred order of the medieval world into a new secular order. We may think here of Descartes' methodological concerns about proving God's existence, or of Newton's positing of space as the "*sensorium*" of God. Both bring in theological considerations only to address seemingly intractable problems in their respective systems. And unsurprisingly, this marginal attempt to assimilate the sacred order of the medieval world into the new secular order of modernity was soon discovered to have shallow roots, eventually abandoned, and finally censured as "unscientific." We may think here first of the purely mathematical universe of Laplace, the first system to have claimed no recourse to theological principles in its astronomy, and then of the more proactive atheism of Darwin, Marx, and Freud who each set about to remove any theological remnants from what they regarded as science. The current ferocious, and often dogmatic response to what its proponents call "intelligent design" is a contemporary case study in the phobic response of secular science to any scent of theology.[4]

There was, it should be noted, a lag of several centuries between the developments of the scientific vision of knowledge, which took place within largely non-academic contexts, and their assimilation within the university. The more traditional, theological vision that had always guided the pursuit of knowledge in the university persisted even into the early decades of the twentieth century.[5] It had not been until the rise of the "research university" in Germany, notably the founding of the University of Berlin in 1809, that a new model of the university was first consolidated, in which modern science was not just included, but seen as exemplary. Scholarship was progressively displaced by "research," and the laboratory experiment came to be seen as the models of the search for knowledge. Soon the

[4] As will be clear from what follows, the proponents of intelligent design are to be faulted not primarily for the lack of sound argumentation that their opponents assert, often without troubling to read their books, but for rather ingenuously overlooking the methodological atheism upon which not just modern natural science, but the contemporary university itself, are both founded.

[5] This theological influence was, in the United States, by no means confined to those universities with a "denominational" background or affiliation. Longfield has shown that only in these first years of the twentieth century did such features as "required courses in Natural Theology and Evidences of Christianity, required chapel, and prayer before class" finally begin to be phased out in major public institutions such as the Universities of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Bradley J. Longfield, "From Evangelicalism to Liberalism: Public Midwestern Universities in Nineteenth Century America, p. 65, in George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, eds., *The Secularization of the Academy*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

research model, with its valorization of the natural sciences, was to be the standard for German and then American universities, and eventually prevailed worldwide.

Unlike the first two moments that led to the founding of the university, there is in this phase no viable synthesis of sacred and secular orders, of transcendence and immanence. On the contrary, efforts directed at moving toward restoring such a synthesis become increasingly seen as threats not just to the university, but to modernity as such. (William Blake's brilliant and prophetic defense of the imagination against the scientific worldview of Bacon, Locke, and Newton comes to mind as a dramatic, but unsuccessful, counter-movement—nor did the related attempts to incorporate teleological and theological elements into science by figures such as Goethe and Schelling find much more success.) The traditional unity of the university that had been grounded in theology began to be progressively replaced by the dominance of a single school, a single faculty—that of modern natural science and its practical extensions, first of all in engineering, and then in other applied fields, especially business. Just as engineering applied the concepts of science, so eventually business programs studied ways to produce and deliver the resulting goods. Meanwhile, the university itself comes to be seen as a business, distributing for a price the "goods" of knowledge and information, and certifying the completed delivery with degrees. Accrediting agencies dutifully insist that quantifiable techniques for "outcome assessment" be developed to demonstrate efficiency in education, demanding a kind of "quality control" similar to what is employed in industrial processes.

Often this dominance of science and its auxiliaries has been subtle and covert, yet today within the university science is indisputably the most powerful current. This new, one-dimensional unity based on science, however, subverts the polyphony that is essential to the university, leaving non-scientific fields to ineffectually re-invent themselves—most successfully in the technologies of social engineering that often prevail in the behavioral sciences, leaving the arts and humanities essentially marginalized. Indeed, with the rise of post-modern epistemologies in the humanities (which originally, along with medicine and law, constituted the core faculties of the university), the ancient disciplines of the liberal arts (such as philosophy, literature, history, and theology) have largely yielded to the sciences any claims to be seeking truth, and have substituted instead the goal of societal change or "social justice" (with the question of how we might know what is socially "just" left unexamined, having already forfeited knowledge claims, and drawing instead upon ready-made answers coming from fashionable political sensibilities). A parallel project of social and cultural protest reigns in the arts, at first individualistic in dada and surrealism, and more recently collectivist. Meanwhile, all scholarship is reduced to (and must justify itself as) "research," i.e. it must package itself as an inquiry that is essentially similar to the pursuit and accumulation of positive knowledge that is undertaken in the sciences. Thus, the arts and humanities, once contributing the unifying center of the university, now cling tenuously to a peripheral role in the modern university, rationalizing *ex post facto* the technological change that now drives them, while recasting and distorting their work into the scientific model of research. But this means that the university is now one-dimensional, ruled by one faculty, with the secular relations of power and efficiency dominant.

The Rise of the Secular University

Herbert Marcuse, in his *One Dimensional Man,* draws upon the Hegelian notion of negation—seen as opening a dimension of otherness—and develops an important insight of the Frankfurt School of Neo-Marxism: the tendency of science and technology toward cultural hegemony. One-dimensional society, based on one-dimensional culture, reduces any notion of an "outside" to a single viewpoint.[6] And indeed, any purely internal or immanent principle of unity—as it plays out culturally and in the university—is antithetical to the transcendent unity that oriented antiquity and the Middle Ages, for which the power of negation was ultimately that of the *via negativa,* the epistemology of negative theology, which understood that the highest unity is irreducible to discursive thought, yet whose very transcendence rendered all partial explanations potentially intelligible. But is such a foundation still possible? Do there really remain apertures within the university through which glimmers of transcendence could even become visible?

If so, they would need to be exercised largely from within the "humanities," out of which all other academic disciplines were once born: from literature, history, and above all philosophy and theology. For both the natural and the behavioral sciences are committed by definition to a methodological naturalism that seems to invariably lead to a purely immanent, naturalistic metaphysic, studying human beings as no more than one component of the same natural universe that the sciences seek to comprehend. But of course, like any mode of relativism, this premise runs aground as an epistemology, for science cannot tolerate seeing itself and its own pursuit of knowing nature as itself simply one more natural phenomenon, of no greater significance than the munching of pandas upon bamboo shoots.[7] Rather, scientific knowledge, in order to function, must be assumed to possess a certain universality, one that presupposes human transcendence of its own natural determinations—a universality of the sort that was once based upon the likeness of human knowledge to divine knowledge. Otherwise, science would be unable to explain its claims to

---

[6] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Routledge, 2006. Marcuse's Frankfurt School colleague, Max Horkheimer, casts the problem as one of sustaining the "dialectical relation of nature and spirit" by avoiding a reductionism on the side of either term of the dialectic. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason,* New York, Seabury Press, 1974, p. 169ff.

[7] John Sommerville, in a recent study of the secularization of the university, notes this contradiction in Stephen Jay Gould's book, *Rock of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life.* While Gould notes that humans are purely and simply part of a nature that is "sublimely indifferent" toward us—of no more significance within the natural order than a snail—at the same time he contrasts human moral duties with nature, which is "amoral." How, Sommerville asks, if humans are merely part of an amoral order that is indifferent to human concerns, can we account for the demands of morality and the fact that we are not at all, in fact, indifferent to one another? C. John Sommerville, *The Decline of the Secular University*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 25. On the political implications of the purely naturalistic viewpoint, Horkheimer observes: "When man is assured that he is nature and nothing but nature, he is at best pitied. Passive, like everything that is only nature, he is supposed to be an object of 'treatment,' finally a being dependent on more or less benevolent leadership." Ibid., p. 170.

universal knowledge, i.e. how it could be genuinely universal, and not just the kind of knowledge that a frog possesses of its own frog-pond. How else could scientific knowledge raise itself above its own objective field of knowledge, while itself remaining nothing more than a part of it—an insoluble dilemma representing an inherent weakness within what Husserl called "the natural attitude"?

The *studia humanitatis* of antiquity sought to hold open the dimensions of human transcendence by exploring through classical literature the power with which human nature could exceed itself, finding within human existence a prevailing grandeur. For example, in the *Iliad*, the first of all "classics," the immortal gods themselves watch in wonder as the Achaeans and Trojans wager everything for the sake of very non-tangible values such as honor and nobility—mortals risking what the immortals could never put at risk, their very being itself. For Cicero, and later for Augustine whom he inspired, the challenge was to bring this sense of human transcendence, drawn from philosophical and literary studies, into the public sphere through rhetoric. In parallel ways, during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages—in Byzantium and Islam, as well as in the Latin West—this *studia humanitatis* was kept alive, although in a somewhat abbreviated form, as the "liberal arts" that formed the center of university studies. But at the same time, what now served as a curriculum was being set more explicitly upon theistic foundations that made the link between human and divine transcendence always visible, while also allowing for a new stability and continuity that rendered the institution of the university possible. In the West, the Renaissance seized upon this *studia humanitas* to retrieve the broader range of humanistic studies, giving new prominence to studies such as literature and history, while moving toward a more secular mooring for learning. In the Enlightenment, this secularization becomes more pronounced, even as the realm of humanistic studies narrows, giving way to the nascent sciences.

Ironically, however, the scientific mindset that displaced the theological orientation was itself based upon deeply theological premises. Of the many historians of science who have seen the rise of modern natural science as based upon a Judeo-Christian worldview, perhaps the most eloquent is the Russian philosopher Pavel Florensky, himself not only an important historian and philosopher of science, but a noted scientist himself. Florensky argues that only with Christianity does nature have an inner reality of its own—have its own relationship to the God who has created it—and thus possess an ontological "weight," a reality proper to it, as distinct from being merely a mask for some shrouded deity—the prerequisite for both the love of nature, and later the science of nature. "This relation to nature," entailing love of its inherent beauty and appreciation its autonomous order, "became conceivable only when people saw in creation not merely a demonic shell, not some emanation of Divinity, not some illusory appearance of God, like a rainbow in a spray of water, but an independent, autonomous, and responsible creation of God, beloved of God and capable of responding to His love."[8]

[8] Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of Truth,* trans. Boris Jakim, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 210.

Only thus does nature become fully real, and truly lovable, and ultimately intelligible. And only then does this intelligibility become notable, for when nature becomes seen as revelatory of an otherwise mysterious creator, its every facet assumes the greatest interest. This affinity for detail—this love of the scientist for the most minute detail of the most obscure species—upon which Nietzsche poured contempt in his derision of the scientist as a near-sighted "nook dweller," becomes intelligible only within this theological orientation, which is still quite evident not only in figures such as Newton, but for those scientists today who are still able to describe the smallest components of the cosmos with genuinely reverent, loving sentiment. So it is that modern natural science, even as it works to complete and perfect the theistic synthesis of secular and sacred, of God and world, dogmatically abandons its own presupposition.

But can we look to the humanities to restore the balance, to offer a renewed sense that the significance of being a scientific knower is itself something splendid and remarkable, yet inexplicable from within the sciences themselves? On the contrary, these very faculties of the university have often lost faith with the self-understanding that would see even their own theoretical activity as the pursuit of knowledge. As already noted, post-modern epistemologies, in their assertion that knowledge-claims are essentially perspectival and ultimately derivative from political interests, have willingly deeded the knowledge franchise to the sciences.[9] Forfeiting knowledge-claims to the sciences, the humanities have now largely retreated into the skepticism of post-modern perspectivism, in which it is no longer truth but the promotion of tacitly political ends that legitimates their endeavors. That is, they have too often become exercises in ideology, if the latter term is taken in its narrower sense to mean a set of truth-claims held not because of a belief in their truth-value, but because of beliefs about the political consequences of believing them. And ironically, the humanities have become ideological in the broader sense as well, in which ideology would be understood as the attempt to make politics deliver what was once expected of *religion*: to elevate by its own means the human condition, and deliver both collective and individual salvation. Thus, in a covert but ineffectual manner, the university remains true to its soteriological origins in theology.

Perhaps, then, it may only be a retrieval of the transcendent mystery of the sacred that would restore to the university its proper multi-dimensionality and universality, and therefore its ability to serve as a proper matrix for the cultivation of what is truly, and fully, human—i.e. to render a transcendent, sacred pole providing for a

[9] Reviewing the controversy over the curricular canon in the American university during the late eighties, John Searle took note of this tendency almost 30 years ago, but at the time he attributed it to only one faction of the humanities faculties, whereas today it is probably to some degree or other the predominant view: "Many members of the cultural left think that the primary function of teaching the humanities is political; they do not really believe that the humanities are valuable in their own right except as means of achieving 'social transformation.' They (apparently) accept that in subjects like physics and mathematics there may be objective and socially independent criteria of excellence … but where the humanities are concerned they think that the criteria that matter are essentially political." John R. Searle, "The Storm Over the University," *The New York Review of Books,* Vol. 37, no. 19, December 6, 1990.

third dimension of depth, and mystery, as opposed to the laterally paired dimensions of "theory" and "application." Yet despite the embrace of "post-modernism" by many of its professors in many of its faculties, the university has remained stubbornly one-dimensional and modernist in a dogmatic insistence on secularity and its often strident aversion to taking seriously theological claims. The modern university, then, may itself be the worst enemy of the possibility of its own renewal.

The Current Problem of Justifying the University

What, we may ask, are the prospects for a renewal of the university that might once again root the mundane with the mysterious, the sacred with the secular? But before examining this question, a more fundamental one must be confronted. Does the university itself really deserve resuscitation? Does it deserve to survive at all?

Addressing this second questions first, it must be acknowledged that it is not immediately evident what social or cultural necessity would mandate the survival of the university as anything more than a loose complex of technical institutes transmitting practical knowledge. Much of the current research in science, medicine, technology, and business is already being conducted outside the university, in "think tanks" and privately funded research facilities. And schools of law and medicine now operate with nearly complete autonomy from their university hosts. Nor is it obvious that education in these fields is being "humanized" to any significant extent through their being pursued within a "liberal arts" milieu, which itself often means nothing more than that there are literature classes being held in some other campus building across the quad. The unifying function that science has now assumed in the wake of theology's eclipse, purporting to replace theology's former role of bringing together the university faculties into a single universe of discourse, is no longer evident even from within the strained attempts at interdisciplinarity that persist from time to time. The occasional power of discovery that still sometimes emerges from interdisciplinary collaboration is rooted far more in the creative energy that naturally emerges from individual interactions themselves than from any nurture provided by the university: on the contrary, when this does blossom, it is probably more often despite its being embedded within a university rather than as a result of it.

This would leave the justification of the university at the doorstep of the humanities faculties. Is the enormous and often unwieldy edifice of the modern university, then, vindicated by the existence and activity of the relatively small faculties of the humanities? One function of the humanities seems uncontroversial, and this is the preservation of the cultural tradition that has brought us to where we are. But does this need to be undertaken within the university context? Does the regime of research in the university aid or detract in this undertaking? And would this not surely be accomplished individually and privately, if it were no longer sponsored publically?[10]

[10] The example of William Blake is instructive here. At the very height of Enlightenment rationalism, operating entirely outside the university system of which he had never been a part, and almost

During the "Dark Ages" of Western Europe, traditional learning was kept alive in small communities, primarily the Christian monasteries that had escaped the barbarian invasions, many of them in far-off Ireland. They preserved the few remaining manuscripts of ancient learning until they could be augmented from Byzantine and Islamic sources. The task of preservation is surely indispensible, but it is not clear why it must be yoked to an institutionalized university framework. And it is even less clear whether the humanities as they exist today—under the influence of a hermeneutic that is by turns ironic, post-modern, politicized, and deconstructive—are engaged in the transmission of texts or rather in their dismantling. Just as it is now believed that ancient Rome was wrecked and dismantled not primarily by barbarian invaders, but by its own residents who no longer saw a use for great structures, yet who needed building materials for their own private projects, so the masterpieces of the past are now being similarly recycled within the various humanities faculties.

But the university has also served as an important vehicle for acquiring new knowledge and uncovering new truths, not just preserving what was once acquired in the past. What of the constructive component of the humanities faculties, the "research" aspect that would seek new truth rather than just aiming to conserve the tradition? But the search for truth is just what the humanities have largely ceded to the sciences. Thus, aside from the hermeneutic task of interpreting major texts for new generations—and increasingly, even this is often shredded and sifted in accord with academic fashions—much of the work done in the humanities must surely appear to an impartial observer as somewhat droll and decidedly esoteric, employing a technical and not infrequently bizarre lexicon that exercises little traction within the everyday language of human affairs; as often trivial, and sometimes preposterous in its conclusions, whether judged by the standards of tradition or against ordinary notions; and thus as irrelevant to what any non-academic person might conceivably care about, a fact that is commonly taken within the university to be an irrefutable indictment of the chronic philistinism (or "anti-intellectualism") of American society.[11]

This is, of course, an aggregate generalization, and by no means applies to all work in the humanities. But it is a waxing tendency that does not inspire hope. And its ascendency surely signifies that the concern with transcendence that has been central to the life of the university since its prehistory in the philosophical schools

---

completely unacknowledged, Blake independently—and often operating solely upon his own experience—rediscovered important elements of the mystical, theological, and poetic traditions that had tacitly sustained Western culture for 2000 years, and which now lay sedimented beneath layers of misunderstanding and distortion. Blake, more than perhaps anyone else, re-discovered transcendence within the densest thicket of immanence. See Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Antiquity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977: "Blake called the scientific philosophy idolatry, for what is it but the worship of sticks and stones? Those who believe that matter is an agent whose activities direct the world are the only heathen who have ever been so blind as to 'bow down to wood and stone.'" Ibid, p. 100.

[11] Sommerville observes that "the liberal arts themselves have changed. They've turned into technical specialties. They're often addressing questions no one is asking, and giving answers no on can understand." Sommerville, *Decline*, p. 8.

of late antiquity to its gradual eclipse in the deism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is not only marginal, but generally unwelcome in the contemporary university, inevitably getting seen as an archaic remnant of an embarrassing past.[12] Indeed, the word "truth" is just as unwelcome in most humanities faculties today as is the word "beauty" in most art faculties, a *faux pas* at best. Even the word "justice," for the time still viable and indeed compelling, has lost the cosmic and transcendent significance it held for Parmenides and Plato, let alone the numinous power it held for the early Greeks .[13] Nor is it grounded in the later natural law tradition. It occupies, rather, an essentially utilitarian niche, and is discernable through primarily sociological criteria of the sort assayed by opinion polls, yet another indication of the primacy of science.

A deeper and richer understanding of just how much has been lost, and perhaps also what might or might not be the possibility of its retrieval or re-invention, can be ascertained through reflecting upon two of the last great defenses of the university in the view modern nihilism: John Henry Cardinal Newman and Alfred North Whitehead, nineteenth century graduates of, and professors at, the English-speaking world's two most ancient and venerable universities, respectively those of Oxford and Cambridge—the two complementary texts facing in opposing directions, while sharing the same concerns. Both defenses of the university are eloquent and deserve to be heard in their own words.

Cardinal Newman: University, Intellectual Coherence, and Transcendence

Newman's *Idea of the University* attempts to justify the implementation of a secular curriculum which yet retains its roots in theology, whose presence he sees as essential to the life of the university—i.e. a curriculum that is similar to what, in the mid-nineteenth century, had still prevailed at his beloved Oxford—at the newly founded Catholic University of Ireland, to which he had been appointed its first Rector.[14] Originally delivered as lectures celebrating the University's inauguration, Newman extols the benefits of liberal education in the university to both the faculty and the students. To the faculty, it offers a place where independent scholars may seek

[12] Richard Rorty compares belief in the existence of God to the ancient belief in crystalline spheres in the heavens. Richard Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres," in Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 49f.

[13] Marcel Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Ancient Greece,* trans Janet Lloyd, New York, Zone Books, 1996, 53–67.

[14] What Newman sees as indispensible to any university is not "revealed" but "natural" theology: "In a word, religious truth is not only a portion but a condition of general knowledge. To blot it out is nothing short, if I may so speak, of unraveling the web of university teaching. It is, according to the Greek proverb, to take the spring from out of the year. …" John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Doubleday, New York, p. 103.

together for the unity and coherence of all knowledge—a unity for which the mind inherently hungers—precisely because it is institutionally grounded in a transcendence that is itself the source of all truth. That is, even in the nineteenth century, Newman can plausibly reassert the transcendent premise of the university itself. But it is when he describes how this search for coherent truth is applied to the task of educating students that Newman's vision is most powerful.

> An assemblage of learned men, zealous for their own sciences, and rivals of each other, are brought by familiar intercourse and for the sake of intellectual peace, to adjust together the claims and relations of their respective subjects of investigation. They learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other. Thus is created a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes, though in his own case he only pursues a few sciences out of the multitude. He profits by an intellectual tradition, which is independent of particular teachers, which guides him in his choice of subjects, and duly interprets for him those which he chooses. He apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles upon which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and its shades, its great points and its little, as he other wise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that his education is called "liberal." A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom; or what in a former discourse I have ventured to call a philosophical habit.[15]

Even today, I believe that few academics will be unable to find something stirring in this description, and most likely something of what originally led them into the university, and which some small part of them likes to believe is still taking place. Yet taken as a whole, this vision—as plausible in nineteenth century Europe and American as it would have been in fifth century Constantinople, ninth century Bagdad, or fourteenth century Paris—will at the same time seem not just idealized, but utterly fantastic as a picture of what actually takes place at the university of the early twenty-first century. Not that there is no element of this kind of reality to be found scattered here and there, but it is just not the main event at all in the business of the university today.

How was this vision lost so quickly? Newman saw already the forces that would pull it apart. "Excellence must have a center," Newman wrote.[16] And if theology and philosophy with their inherent orientation toward the transcendent are not the center, then there will be many centers, with the pursuit of knowledge becoming everywhere eccentric, i.e. lacking a common center.

> It seems, as I then observed, that the human mind is ever seeking to systematize its knowledge, to base it upon principle, and to find a science comprehensive of all sciences. And sooner than forgo the gratification of this moral appetency, it starts with whatever knowledge or science it happens to have, and makes *that knowledge* serve as a rule or measure of the universe, for want of a better, preferring the completeness and precision of bigotry to a fluctuating and homeless skepticism[17]

---

[15] Ibid, pp. 128f.

[16] Cited in John Coulson, "Newman's Idea of an Educated Laity—the Two Versions," p. 51, in John Coulson, ed., *Theology and the University: An Ecumenical Investigation,* Baltimore, Helicon Press, 1964.

[17] Newman, "General Knowledge Viewed as One Philosophy," p. 140, italics added, in John Henry Newman, *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education*, Dublin, James Duffy,

The result of this tendency, of course, is precisely the intellectual smorgasbord that we find in the university today, and which in 1853 Newman envisioned brilliantly and prophetically as something then merely hypothetical, a curricular *reductio ad absurdum* that would not even "rise to the very idea of a university." Rather, such a de-centered university would be:

> a sort of bazaar, or *pantechnicon*, in which wares of all kinds are heaped together for sale in stalls independent of each other, and that, to save the purchasers the trouble of running about from shop to shop; or an hotel or lodging house, where all professions and classes are at liberty to congregate, varying, however, according to the season, each of them strange to each, and about its own work or pleasure. …[18]

But surely there is little likelihood at present that a movement toward re-implementing such a traditional institution could take place, apart from a particular university under the tutelage of some religious vision or other. And even then, critical problems of "accreditation" would surely arise if something like this were actually to be implemented. Nor is it likely that much attention would be paid to its activities by more conventional institutions. Far from its being considered the highest knowledge of what is highest, few even within theological circles see theology as a kind of knowledge at all, at least knowledge by contemporary criteria. Where theology is still taught outside of heavily denominational settings, it is generally offered in religious studies departments, which are professionally committed to bracketing the truth claims of religion in favor of an objective approach more closely resembling that of the anthropologist than the traditional theologian. Nor is philosophy in any condition to assume this role of mediating transcendence; rather, its main tendencies have long been in the opposite direction.

Moreover, such a movement would seem profoundly retrograde, and perhaps would rightly be so accused, in light of Heidegger's powerful and widely influential critique of what he called "onto-theology"—i.e. the project, underlying much Western metaphysics and epistemology, to see the deity as the highest being, the knowledge of whom serves to grounds all other knowledge. Such a metaphysics not only, as Nietzsche had charged, devalues the visible in favor of the invisible, but as Heidegger elaborates, onto-theology substitutes for a living god "the god of philosophy," a god to whom one "can neither fall on his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god"— i.e. it subverts the very mystery and holiness that constitutes the divine element, delivering not a genuine deity but a *causa sui,* a self-caused cause, that serves merely as an explanatory principle.[19] Heidegger is probably anachronistic in tracing this "onto-theological constitution of metaphysics" all the way back to the Pre-Socratics, but certainly it is prevalent in the late

1852. This is the important Part Five of the original lectures that was not included in the later *Idea of the University.*

[18] Ibid, pp. 139f.

[19] Martin Heidegger, "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics," p. 72, in Heidegger, *Identity and Difference,* trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York, Harper and Row, 1969. The religious critique of onto-theology as a kind of "idolatry" is richly developed in the work of Jean-Luc Marion. See especially Marion, *God without Being,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991.

scholasticism that crowned the medieval Latin university and prepared the epistemological foundations of modern naturalism—according to which what can be known is or can be known by the sciences. God henceforth becomes a provisional accomplice to modern science, as is the case with the deism of the Enlightenment, but ultimately a hypothesis, as Laplace explained to Napoleon, who is no longer required.[20] Thus, the theological foundation of the university, as it is elaborated in the later scholasticism of the Latin West by figures such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, gives birth to the naturalistic worldview of the sciences that becomes the new basis for the unity of knowledge, thereby becoming the principle of its own obsolescence.[21] It is not surprising, then, that Newman's system of knowledge bears a striking resemblance to that of Descartes, with the exception that it is theology rather than philosophy that grounds the system, for both systems share a common ancestry. The conclusion thus seems unavoidable that whatever affection or nostalgia may still be evoked by Newman's vision of a unified system of knowledge with theology at the top, drawing together the faculties of the university into cohesion, its restoration is neither likely, nor viable, nor probably even desirable, a vision of the past more proper to a time when modernity was still young. If the sacred and secular are still to be drawn together within the university, it will not be in this way.[22]

An Insight from Whitehead on Imagination and the University

But a more modest, yet ultimately perhaps a more compelling, justification for the university can be found in Alfred North Whitehead's brief essay, "Universities and their Function." Like the addresses forming the basis for Newman's *Idea of a University*, this too was written to commemorate a specific inauguration: not the

[20] Unlike the system of Laplace, Newtonian astronomy had required the hypothesis of divine intervention to explain the ongoing stability of the solar system. When Laplace presented his five volume *Celestial Mechanics* to Napoleon, the latter noted that he had heard that in this large book about the universe, there was no mention of its Creator. Laplace responded to him curtly: "I had no need for that particular hypothesis."

[21] With Scotus' principle of the univocity of being, God is no longer seen as possessing the non-particular being that could run through all things, but rather the same kind of individual being of "sticks and stones." With Ockham's nominalism, "transcendentals" such as beauty and goodness that had always been seen as offering glimpses of transcendence within the visible become seen as abstractions rather than as realities.

[22] Perhaps the only approximations in recent history to Newman's "idea" have been the monstrous examples of fascist and communist governments subordinating the university to "higher" and pseudo-transcendent principles. Clearly this had little to do with what Newman intended, nor did he in any way influence these developments. Nevertheless, ideas have consequences that are often unintended, and these frightening implementations should give us pause at how such an idea of the university might actually get implemented. Sadly, it was Martin Heidegger, the first to explicitly articulate the critique of onto-theology, who eloquently advocated the politicization of the German university during the 1930s. See his *Self-Assertion of the German University*.

founding of a new university, but at first glance implausibly, the institution of a College of Business at Harvard University, where Whitehead was then teaching, a context that in fact encouraged him to sharpen the relevance of his observations to a technological society.

He begins by granting what is obvious, yet which is seldom acknowledged even today: that the two main tasks of the modern university, education and research, can both be performed just as effectively and "at a cheaper rate, apart from these expensive institutions." The justification for the university's existence, then, "is not to be discovered either in the mere knowledge conveyed to the students or in the mere opportunities for research afforded to the members of the faculty."[23] It is, rather, in the chemistry that takes place when these two functions are brought into immediate contact with one another that the magic of the university is to be found. Bringing together the experience and knowledge of those who know with the energy and imagination of those who want to learn results in a vitality that energizes not just faculty and students alike, but that radiates into a nation, a people, or a culture as a whole, inciting them to achievements that become the source of their very identities, for as Whitehead notes, "we love to be members of a society which can do [great] things."[24]

> The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest for life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning. The university imparts information, but it imparts it imaginatively … A fact is no longer a bare fact: *it is invested with all its possibilities.* It is no longer a burden on the memory: it is energizing as the poet of our dreams, and as the architect of our purposes … The task of a university is to weld together imagination and experience.[25]

Brought continually into contact with new generations of students, perpetually energetic and imaginative and full of life, the researcher himself is reborn as a professor: his otherwise arid and abstract knowledge must itself be brought to life, as he is forced to translate the knowledge and experience that has become settled and stale for him into a medium that will engage the imagination and youthful energies of his students. "The universities should be homes of adventure shared in common by young and old. For successful education there must always be a certain freshness in the knowledge dealt with. … Knowledge does not keep any better than fish," Whitehead argues, and even if the knowledge to be imparted is not itself new, "somehow or other it must come to the students, as it were, just drawn out of the sea and with the freshness of its immediate importance."[26] Even if it is purely scholarly knowledge that is being conveyed, "it is the function of the scholar to evoke into life wisdom and beauty which, apart from his magic, would remain lost in the past."[27]

---

[23] Alfred North Whitehead, "Universities and Their Function," in Whitehead, *The Aims of Education*, New York, The Press Press, 1967, p. 92.

[24] Ibid. p. 95.

[25] Ibid, p. 93. Italics added.

[26] Ibid p. 98

[27] Ibd.

And here it becomes clearer why the newly established College of Business presents an important case study for him. For it turns out that "applied" knowledge is nothing new to the university, and indeed the University of Salerno—by some accounts, the first university in Western Europe—was originally only a school of medicine. It is not, then, because it deals with applied knowledge that the business curriculum holds special significance here, but because it embodies most fully a feature that it shares with all other technically oriented fields of study today: "technical excellence can only be acquired by a training which is apt to damage those energies of mind which should direct the technical skill." Moreover, the early stages of virtually all professional careers, both technical and otherwise, initiate their newest members through assigning them at first to relatively routine tasks, "jobs which consist in carrying out fixed duties in obedience to orders." The danger, then, is increasingly that by the time the training and the apprenticeship is complete, "prolonged routine work dulls the imagination [and] qualities essential at a later stage of a career are apt to be stamped out in an earlier stage." Thus, it is the increasingly vital task of the university in a technological society to stimulate the imagination in such a way that routine can will be filled with life and significance, carrying the career into its more mature stage, when demands upon the imagination will gradually replace routine.

> The way in which a university should function in the preparation for an intellectual career, such as modern business or one of the older professions, is by promoting the imaginative consideration of the various *general principles* underlying that career. Its students thus pass into their period of technical apprenticeship with their imaginations already practiced in connecting details with general principles. The routine then receives its meaning, and also illuminates the principles which give it that meaning.[28]

"Thus the proper function of a university," Whitehead concludes, "is the imaginative acquisition of knowledge."[29]

It would be easy to take this as platitudinous, admonishing all diligent professors to season their lectures with lively anecdotes and amusing illustrations. But Whitehead is saying much more than this, and its implications are far-reaching. He is saying that the heart of the university is neither the faculty nor the students, neither scholarship and research nor education, but the imaginative energies—along with the intellectual excitement and zest for living that accompany them—that arise when the two poles are bought into contact with each other. The imaginative element provoked, incited, elicited through this interaction brings to life something of the greatest importance for both student and professor—persisting with the former as the beating heart of a creative career, and enduring with the latter as the motive for the research and scholarship that will be imaginatively transmitted to yet another generation—as well as spilling over into society in ways that are important for the life of the community.[30]

---

[28] Ibid. p. 96. Italics added.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Significantly, Whitehead in certain ways anticipates the conclusions of Edmund Husserl, his younger colleague in Germany, and himself a mathematician like Whitehead. In his *Crisis of the*

Whitehead understands the imagination here in the traditional sense of Western philosophy to be what links the universal and the particular, "connecting details with general principles," investing mere "facts" with all their "possibilities." But this rooting of the particular in the universal, the factual in the possible, is not the same as the linking of an application to the theory that sustains it, for according to Whitehead, it is just the theory itself that must be vitalized, invigorated, animated from being a mere abstraction—not in order for it to be applied, for this is presupposed in any successful theory, but in order for both theory and application to meaningful, compelling, exciting.

For Kant, imagination was the synthetic power that could bring together the universal with the particular, the possible with the actual, and thus what he called "transcendental imagination" was the synthetic faculty *par excellence* that brought together within experience all the elements of knowledge into a single, unified whole. For Plato, in the *Republic* and its image of the divided line, imagination or *eikasia*—as distinct from *phantasia* or "fantasy"—was also a unifier, drawing together the many images toward the one original to which they point and signify—at first from the visible image to the visible original, but later from the visible image to the *invisible original* to which the visible community is nevertheless beholden. Yet this is itself a striking example of what was described in Part I of this essay as the secular redaction of an ultimately religious theme in Plato and other representatives of the Greek secular renaissance: of the descent of the god, of the epiphany of transcendence within immanence, of the *methexis* or participation of the visible with the invisible *itself* becoming visible. Or put in even more elementary terms, the modern concept of imagination, philosophically forged by Kant and the German Idealists, even as it was creatively extrapolated by Blake and his successors, is largely a modern revival of the ancient Greek *theōria* or illumination, ancestor to the medieval Latin *contemplatio* or contemplation: the seeing of the invisible within the visible that constitutes the source and essence of all living religion, and because the latter is its source, the ultimate legitimation of all mystical experience.

Referring this to Whitehead's example, the sources to which the imagination connects would be more than just formal properties, but what he calls "the higher categories of eternal objects" that themselves found the abstractions.[31] And indeed Whitehead's epistemology assigns just such a connecting role between the eternal

European Sciences, written 8 years after Whitehead's reflections on the university, Husserl complained that the "sciences" or *Wissenschaften*—the bodies of knowledge, both scientific and humanistic, that the universities strive to preserve, advance, and transmit—were becoming abstract and removed from their living sources in the *Lebenswelt*, the world of experience to which all concepts must ultimately refer. Like Whitehead, Husserl saw an increasing challenge to link knowledge with its vital origins. For Husserl, this is a task for what he calls "transcendental phenomenology" and which bears a striking resemblance to what Whitehead calls here "imagination," if in no other way than in tracing the abstractions of knowledge back to their origins roots in lived experience that gave them birth and that continue to render to them whatever ongoing meaning they will possess.

[31] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: Corrected Edition,* ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, New York, The Free Press, 1978, p. 115.

and the temporal to the imagination. But where, for Whitehead, is the deity in this? God is "the ground of all order and originality," luring and enticing free creativity in the direction of the divine goodness—"the antecedent ground conditioning every creative act… the mirror which discloses to every creature its own greatness."[32] Thus, if we were to conclude with Whitehead that imagination is not just a necessary component of the university, but its very heart, then the infusion of the invisible into the visible, of the possible into the actual, of the eternal into the temporal—and we may, in at least a limited sense, say of the sacred into the secular—would remain enduringly present, even if in a subtle and perhaps tacit manner.

Apertures of Transcendence Within the University

Few philosophers have been able to render the religious and spiritual traditions of the past more palatable to modern sensibilities than has Whitehead, and this is no small accomplishment. But is his ultimately secularized, and somewhat intellectualized, notion of the sacred sufficient to constitute a fourth historical moment in the dialectic of the university, one in which the secular militancy of the Enlightenment would be counter-balanced by its complementary sacred or numinous principle? Does this understanding of imagination and its metaphysical ground adequately hold open the dimension of radical alterity or otherness that has made possible the achievements and excellence of the university? Is there a compelling element of mystery here, a "thick" narrative of transcendence at work, or rather just a "thin" and comfortable celebration of realities that no one would care to contest, but which in fact would challenge little, leaving intact the hegemony of the science faculties and their reigning naturalistic epistemology? For who cannot claim creativity in their work, and thus by this standard, the putative agency of the Holy Spirit, properly so re-interpreted?

Of those who sense that there is a cause for concern regarding the increasing resistance to transcendence shown by both the university faculties and the intellectual community as a whole, many will doubtless be reassured by Whitehead's reflections. They suggest a spark of transcendence at play within every occasion that the university is functioning at its best. Moreover, they come as successors to a distinguished lineage of major, although reductionist, philosophers who attempted to accurately translate spiritual truth into a mundane idiom, represented by figures such as Kant (who tried to show that the truth of religion was ethical), Hegel (who purported to demonstrate that the truth of religion was historical and cultural), Feuerbach (who worked to show that the truth of religion was social and communal), and Marx (who argued that it was political and economic). But there will be

[32] Ibid. p. 108; Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making,* Cleveland, The World Publishing Company, p. 148.

additionally, and perhaps significantly, some smaller number of the unconvinced, who hear Heidegger's gloss upon Hölderlin's lament over the "flight of the gods" with troubled apprehension and the fear that something essential is in danger of being lost. These putatively retrograde individuals, each out of step with both modernity and its post-modern enablers, will doubtless feel that the eclipse of the holy within our shared experience of the world is a loss of something pivotal and essential.

Beyond this point, I fear, we are at a loss to predict the future. For who, in the third century, could have anticipated the triumph of the seemingly exotic teachings of Judeo-Christian theism within the polished, sophisticated institutions of late antiquity, even given the fact that pagan philosophy and religious speculation had themselves already arrived at monotheistic conclusions? How does the light of transcendence get generated in a way that is powerful enough to elevate and transfigure mundane, secular knowledge? Perhaps it is mistaken to simply look toward the university as the proper place for this flame to be re-ignited, rather than as the place where it would is gradually tested and debated and its viability demonstrated.

Plato's Academy—established on the site of sacred olive groves dedicated to Athena, a place where various religious rituals had long been performed— is in an important sense the true prototype of the university. Although originally more a milieu of philosophers than a structured institution with designated teachers and students, it nevertheless brought together different kinds of learning into a unified project of inquiry. It is not clear what subjects were studied, apart from dialectics, mathematics, and astronomy, but Plato's "greatest study" of metaphysical transcendence—variously named in the dialogues as the Good, the One, and the Same, and itself most likely rooted in the mystery religions of the time—cannot have been prominent enough to prevent the Academy from embodying, within a generation, a radical closure to the metaphysical as such, by means of a skepticism that prevailed there for centuries, and that may be interestingly compared to the post-modern skepticism of today. Nor is this surprising, given the protective esotericism concerning the highest truths which Plato espouses directly in his letters, and indirectly in the dialogues themselves. Yet gradually, through an unknown history, transcendence does somehow percolate into the Academy, with avowedly Christian teachers represented at least by the fourth century, and the heavily theocentric concerns of Middle Platonism in the fifth. We can assume a similar gradualism in the School of Alexandria as well, leading to the fourth century when Christian and pagan Neoplatonists debated theological concepts between themselves.

"How does the deity enter into philosophy?," asks Heidegger in his "Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics."[33] And parallel to this, we may question here how it is that the deity, and the dimension of transcendence in general, enters into the university? It is difficult to find fresh infusions of alterity or transcendence entering into the university primarily from within. At best, we find figures such as

[33] *Identity and Difference*, p. 55.

Meister Eckhart—comfortable within the university, but hardly at home there—who challenge the constructions and abstractions of scholastic theology with a dimension of transcendence far more radical, and much more threatening, as his stormy reception indicates. As suggested already, an example that casts even more doubt on the permeability of modernity to transcendence can be found in the case of William Blake, with whom it is instructive to compare perhaps the most influential of modern philosophers, G. F. W. Hegel. Blake emerges as the consummate outsider, neither trained from within the university, nor benefitting from its labors. So thoroughly had the British university failed to preserve the ancient theological tradition—misconstruing it either as Enlightenment Deism or Protestant moralism—Blake was forced to forge a new and remarkable lexicon of his own, to freshly and comprehensively articulate realities that had, largely unknown to him, long ago been discovered and named.[34] And not surprisingly, the response from the university was to largely ignore him for 200 years. In contrast, Hegel assimilated transcendence into the conventional currency of his day, thereby spawning a cottage industry devoted to secularizing sacred truth into expressions that can be easily assimilated into the commonplace discussions prevailing in society. As Kierkegaard seems to realize, Hegel's reward for his acquiescence to the conventions of his academic colleagues has been his enthronement as a monument of Western thought, while Blake (and indeed, Kierkegaard himself) remains obscure and marginal.

Increasingly, the concepts of sacred and secular are becoming assimilated into those of private and public. Or put differently, as Hannah Arendt saw it, there is a decline of the public realm as a "sphere of appearance" that would cast light upon human affairs, leaving us in what she calls "dark times."[35] Given this unsupportive situation, and the distortions that it necessarily entails, the incorporation of the transcendent into the immanent must be a movement in which the sacred somehow, and always against the current, re-emerges within the secular, while still retaining its integrity. And the template for this movement is surely uncertain and irregular. Some have proposed what we may call after MacIntyre the "Benedictine solution" (or after Dreher "the Benedict option"): "the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us."[36] Macintyre refers here, of course, to the rise of monasticism in the West, which preserved not just the light of transcendence but civilization itself during the Dark Ages. And it is certainly of interest that some forms of monasticism have been revived, and even initiated, in

---

[34] Cf. Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake,* Boston, Beacon Press, 1965, especially "The Case Against Locke," pp. 3–29. Blake was certainly aware of the Platonist tradition in its pagan elaboration, but seems to have had little acquaintance with the texts of early Christian mysticism that would have been most compatible with his own visionary explorations.

[35] "The public realm has lost the power of illumination which was originally part of its very nature." Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1968, p. 4.

[36] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame, IN, Notre Dame University Press, 1984, p, 263; Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2107).

certain areas during recent decades.[37] A similar strategy of withdrawal is noted by Arendt, citing Heidegger: "There is no escape, according to Heidegger, from the 'incomprehensible triviality' of this common everyday world except by withdrawal from it into that solitude which philosophers since Parmenides and Plato have opposed to the political realm."[38] Yet even in this case, we will have the lives of these figures as guideposts:

> Even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination, and … such illumination may well come less from theories and concepts than from the uncertain, flickering, and often weak light that some men and women, in their lives and in their works. …[39]

Arendt's insight here suggests a different understanding of the role of charisma in the university, a central topic of William Clark's notable work on the rise of the research university.[40] Rather than seeing it as the authoritarian remnant of an earlier order, we can understand the characteristic charisma of the professor by means of Whitehead's analysis, as deriving from the transcendent horizon that the imaginative element of the university necessarily entails, and the glimmer of light and hope that it casts. But beyond the person of the professor, are there apertures for transcendence within the "theories and concepts" of the university today?

There are alternatives to the dilemma posed by Hegel's reductionist account of transcendence, and the account of Blake, which waited until the twentieth century to begin to be assimilated into the discourse of the university. Whitehead's own work, despite its pronounced emphasis on immanence, is one example, while Heidegger's writings on a *letzte Gott*, and upon *die Göttlichen* as a dimension of the fourfold, are hardly less esoteric (and idiosyncratic) than the texts of Blake. In France, Levinas has used a phenomenological medium to discuss radical transcendence, while Marion has employed both phenomenological and post-modern considerations to explore what he calls the "saturated phenomenon" as a medium of transcendence. Nor are these inquiries confined to philosophy. In sociology, Peter Berger has found within the sociology of everyday life what he calls multiple, subtle "signals of transcendence." Wendell Berry has drawn from the agrarian spirituality of rural America to retrieve a traditional and unassuming sense of the holy. René Girard and Jacques Ellul have approached the socio-cultural structures of violence and modern technology with theological sensibilities. In fiction, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Conner, and above all, Fyodor Dostoevsky have woven the experience

---

[37] It is widely known that a number of Buddhist monasteries were founded in certain Western nations during the sixties, many of which flourish today. Less publicized has been the re-invigoration of monasticism in the Orthodox East (in countries such as Greece, Russia, Romania, and Egypt) as well as the establishment of dozens of Orthodox monasteries in England, France, and North America during the past three decades, most of which are populated by young men and women, many of whom are highly educated and quite at home with the discourse of the university. See Scott Cairns, *Young Monks*, which is forthcoming.

[38] Ibid, p. ix.

[39] Ibid.

[40] William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006.

of transcendence, and its absence, into their narratives, although the conceptual rigidity of the university is indicated in the case of Dostoevsky by the regularity with which spirituality in his novels is rendered into the purely immanent lexicon of psychology in the critical literature. And in poetry, Eliot and Rilke struggled to give voice to the trace of the sacred, as well as its withdrawal, within the *saeculorum*. In the sciences themselves, figures such as Polkinghorne—who are both distinguished scientists, as well as natural theologians—as well as historians of science such as S.H. Nasr, have written extensively to demonstrate the viability of transcendence within science itself, and even such towering individuals as Einstein have given generous hints of this possibility. Finally, in theology proper, thinkers such as Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Sergei Bulgakov have developed powerful versions of a non-reductive theology of divine transcendence within respective Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox idioms, although it is not clear who, if anyone, will succeed them.

Nor are these apertures to be found only in the writings of specific individuals, or even within the proposed "Benedictine" communities. Clark, among others, has shown that in the "colleges" of the medieval university, the monastic *vita contempliva* that had given birth to the Western university was still preserved.[41] Currently, at least in the United States, what are there called "liberal arts colleges" not infrequently keep alive a collegiality and sense of community that is conducive to the immediacy and openness that would allow a re-entry of transcendence into academic reality, nor is it accidental that many of them preserve as least informal links to their original, denominational sponsors. It is not possible to anticipate what additional form these smaller communities might take. Already the recent technologies of internet, email, and fax—along with the ease of travel—have provided professionally active academics the possibility of belonging to non-local collegia, consisting of colleagues from across the world. And new assemblages within the so-called "blogosphere"— a discursive universe of "web-logs" or "blogs" that link to each other, and form communities of intensively active dialogue—show that there are likely to develop forms of community that we cannot now envisage, if the dangers of a new tribalism emerging from such immediacy of communication can be averted.

The call to the university heard both from individuals (professors "imaginative" and "charismatic") and from smaller communities of learning and discourse—the call to a renewed calling—will initially be discernable as a still small voice from far away, a gentle resonance that will at first perhaps be heard by the university's administration and faculty senate, not so much as the compelling lure of a Kantian "regulative ideal," but rather as the beautiful siren song against which precautionary measures must be taken. It is to be hoped that as that time arrives, Plato's insight that all the most important knowledge ultimately has its foundation in *erōs*, will quietly prevail among the receptive, allowing a renewed vision of the university to enchant and animate and invigorate learning anew for yet another millennium.

If the longstanding concern with transcendence in the university is based upon class interest, or *ressentiment*, or wish-fulfillment as its critics have often stridently

---

[41] Clark, pp. 75, 146, 149.

maintained, then its eclipse will either be of little consequence, or more likely, it will be for the better. But if it is founded upon the quiet, yet irreducible and irrepressible intuition—common to humanity—of a dimension that is itself not just transcendent, but critically and ontologically supportive of both human transcendence and of immanence *per se,* then there need be no worry of its suppression being itself more than temporary and transitional and ultimately ephemeral.

Chapter Nineteen Approaches to Teaching a Great Books Core at an Orthodox College

If we are to consider seriously the possibility of an Orthodox college in North America, then it is worth considering how it might best deliver a core curriculum that is based on the kinds of texts commonly designated as "great books." That there ought to be a core, and that it should be based on classic texts, are assumptions for which I will not argue at any length. Concerning the former, it seems to me rather evident that twentieth century experiments in abandoning a core curriculum altogether have been unsatisfactory, not only in making higher education a hit and miss proposition for the students, and resulting in highly unpredictable outcomes, but leaving the faculty with virtually nothing in common upon which they can reliably build in delivering non-core classes. And that this core should be based upon Great Books seems to me especially compelling at a college meant to express Orthodox Christianity, which has sustained such a powerful and characteristic respect for tradition. Beyond this, Great Books expose students to the greatest minds, both challenging them, and teaching them humility. Moreover, the very stature of what we unfashionably call "Great Books" typically consists in their richness and multidimensionality. (For example a very long, and very interesting, book could be written recounting the many differing interpretations of Plato's Republic during the last two and a half millennia.) Learning not just to cope with this element, but to thrive within it seems to me the best way to teach young minds to deal with a world that does is not often susceptible to clear-cut interpretations, and with problems that rarely admit of simple solutions. The question of how much of the curriculum should consist of Great Books courses, I think it best to leave open for now, although I will say that I think it should probably be well under half.

But how to best deliver the Great Books? In the dozen colleges and universities at which I have been either a student or an educator, I have encountered three different approaches. None of them seem to me sufficient in themselves for what I think

---

An earlier version of this essay was presented June 10, 2011, at the Conference "Orthodox Christianity and Higher Education," St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, Yonkers, NY.

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1_19

an Orthodox college should seek to accomplish, but I think there is something to be learned from each of them. I will call these approaches the programmatic, the professorial, and the hermeneutic.

The programmatic approach studies Great Books with the goal of discerning the unfolding of some program, either intended or unintended. Thus, it is teleological and essentially historical. The study of the Pre-Socratic philosophers, for example, will show us the development of thought from the dusky light of myth toward the bright light of Socratic rationality. Or the study of Renaissance art will teach us the gradual discovery and mastery of optical perspective within the medium of painting. Or as Hegel claimed, the study of the works of the human spirit will show us the unfolding of the master plan of history itself, from a time when one is free, to an epoch when some are free, to a final era in which all are free, first only implicitly, and then gradually explicitly as well. The programmatic approach is that of the old Western Civilization courses many of us took as Freshmen, often irreverently termed "Plato to NATO" courses. Great Books show us the slow unfolding of modern civilization, with scientific rationality and liberal democracy as its crowning achievements. A variant of this approach was used in teaching the Great Books core at a moderate-sized Roman Catholic university of some intellectual repute, where I taught for 3 years before taking my current position. Here, at least in the early eighties, a great deal of school rhetoric concerned the claim that the truth was not only objective and knowable, but was in fact within the protective custody of the resident faculty. The Great Books core, then, constituting somewhat less than a third of the curriculum, was supposed to make good on this happy claim.

It is perhaps too easy in a post-modern era to regard this programmatic approach glibly and dismissively. After all, did not Jean-François Lyotard define the postmodern sensibility as a suspicion concerning narratives concerning how we got to be who we are, while of course always proceeding from the uncritical assumption that it is a fine thing to indeed be who we are? But is the only alternative an equally unspoken, nihilistic assumption that we are no one in particular, nor are we really going anywhere, i.e. that cultural history makes no sense? And wouldn't an Orthodox college want to assert that in fact we do, in some decisive sense, know the truth? I think that here we would want to claim that in fact the truth is a *person* and not a set of propositions, but this complicates things considerably, rendering any kind of simple narrative or easily definable program problematic. And while the programmatic and historical approach distorts what is truly great in these Great Books, i.e. their inexhaustible richness and multi-dimensionality, by reducing them to simple stair steps, surely we would not want to teach them as discrete, atomic entities, each revolving in its own orbit and unrelated to the others. Put theologically, if the truths to be found in each of these great *logoi* or discourses reflects the eternal *Logos* who is Himself the Way and the Truth, and if Orthodox pedagogy must proceed from this awareness, how do we present this vital reality to students without being reductionistic and didactic?

The second approach is what I will call the professorial, and while it has always been well-represented, it now predominates in higher education today. Each professor is totally free to approach these great classics in whatever way he pleases. As a

scrupulous scholar. As a compassionate advocate of social justice. As a savvy deconstructionist. As a refined aesthete. As a fiery prophet of some cause or another. Here the academy begins to resemble what Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* called a "spiritual zoo": every intellectual species can be found in some classroom or other, however exotic or implausible. And just as Plato called radical democracy the most motley and most lovely of all regimes, so too the professorial approach can result in stunning brilliance or utter inanity. This is so much the case that a student signing up for a course with an unknown professor must ask himself the question made famous by Clint Eastwood: "Am I feeling lucky today?"

Now while in its pure form, the professorial approach is a prescription for curricular incoherence, and beyond this is likely to undermine the main value of reading Great Books in the first place—since what one gets is often just the opinions of the professor, imported into the text—neither should we want to discount altogether the personal element in reading or in teaching. Each faculty member *ought* to bring his or her research and scholarship into the class, sharing their best thoughts with their students. And surely an encounter with these Great Books can be the best venue for this to take place. Nor, practically speaking, can this approach be altogether eliminated anyway. For example, no matter how rigidly programmatic a curriculum purports to be, the point of view of the individual professor will inevitable hold sway. But most important for an Orthodox college, if the truth is not a set of propositions but a person, must not the act of knowing—and of teaching how to know—be something inherently personal, more a *relation* than an *assertion*. How, then, can we maintain and even encourage the personal, while discouraging the capricious and arbitrary?

The third model for teaching Great Books is one that I will term the hermeneutic model, and I will note from the outset that it is the one I favor most. It is best known as constituting the predominant approach employed at St John's College, the most successful and widely emulated "Great Books" program in North America, and I have been fortunate to teach for three summers in its Graduate Institute. (But I will hasten to add that I speak here of this approach only as I have understood it, and neither wish nor feel qualified to represent the pedagogy of St John's College) Paralleling the hermeneutic methodology of Hans Georg Gadamer—with whom it shares a common ancestry in the teaching and writing of Martin Heidegger as appropriated and brought to America by other students of Heidegger such as Jacob Klein and Leo Strauss—the hermeneutic approach involves posing serious, sincere (i.e. non-rhetorical), probing questions to the texts, and then reading very carefully and *listening to the text itself* for answers. Those familiar with the tradition of scriptural hermeneutics in Germany from Schleiermacher onward will immediately recognize this approach as having its ultimate predecessor in the exegesis of scripture. The professor, in this case, does not profess anything at all here, other than a certain amount of experience in knowing how to pose good questions, questions appropriate to the text itself, and then read the text closely and carefully in search of an answer. Hence, at St John's teachers are not called professors at all, but tutors, to indicate that they are fellow learners. And listeners.

But surely there are better and worse questions to pose to the text. What decides which questions are to be asked? Doesn't this judgment itself depend on a sensitivity to the text that has already, gradually discerned what may be at issue in the text, an ability to listen even before any questions have even been posed? And related to this, what does it mean to say that the text itself answers? How can a text speak in anything but a metaphorical sense?

There are various ways to address these questions—too many to examine in this presentation. But I believe that Orthodox Christianity has the resources to answer these questions in a way that will illumine the earlier two modes of reading—the programmatic and professorial—as well. For Orthodoxy has always understood the concept of *Logos* in a manner that is both *ontological* and *hypostatic*. Ontological, in that the Prologue to the Gospel of St John and its cosmic understanding of the *Logos* has played a decisive role in Orthodox thought, something that can perhaps be most clearly seen in the thought of St Maximus the Confessor, but that is quite evident from the early Alexandrians and Cappadocians to the contemporary theological thought of Lossky and Yannaras. Hypostatic in that Christ is the Eternal Logos, woven not just into all creation, but into all discourse, however overtly or however suppressed and darkened this presence may be within one *logos* or another. Our encounter with the other is always, necessarily, an encounter with Christ, who reminded his disciplines that their treatment of others was a response to Him who created these others and addresses us through them. That is, I want to argue that all authentic learning must be, however tacitly and unknowingly, a seeking for the creator within creation, of the *Logos* within the *logoi*, of the Truth within the truths. And thus, all learning must be a listening, a personal relating of hearing and listening and ultimately of loving. This is not, I hasten to add, an ideologically laden program, a heavy-handed schema of teaching and learning, but an approach to creation and its creation, and to others who are created in His image. It is a sacramental approach to the world, to the other, to the text itself that seeks to enter into a living relationship with the Logos Who is at the same time reaching out to the learner, wishing to be known and understood. And texts that are worth reading as Great Books must surely derive their very greatness from being an embodiment and indeed incarnation—however imperfect and heavy-laden with garments that may at first confuse and bewilder—of the Word through whom and for whom all things are made and continue to receive their meaning and intelligibility.

Does this imply, then, that Orthodox Christians are, at least potentially, the best readers of Great Books? Indeed, this is exactly what I want to suggest, at least ideally. For is not our teacher in how to read Great Books the Logos Himself, the author of all, who showed his contemporaries how to read? Read what? The scriptures, of course, and we must remember that the scriptures here refer not to the New Testament, but to what Christians call the Old Testament—i.e. to what does not at first seem to be about Christ at all. Christ Himself, beginning with his exegesis of a text from scripture in the synagogue in Nazareth at the onset of his ministry, and continuing through his discussion of scripture on the Road to Emmaus, taught the disciples how to discern what the scriptures had been straining to get at all along, but which only through the guidance of Christ could now be discerned. That Christ

passed along this ability to read Great Books to His disciples is attested by the reading of the classic texts of the ancient world by the early fathers, who found Christ present in Heraclitus, who spoke much of the word in Plato and Aristotle, in the Stoics and in Virgil and indeed, wherever they looked now that their eyes had been opened. And this ability to read Great Books is already attested in the Book of Acts, in a passage (8:26–40) with which I shall conclude this presentation, and which I believe which provides for us a model for how Great Books should be read at an Orthodox College:

> "And the angel of the Lord spoke unto Philip, saying, "Arise, and go toward the south unto the road that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert."
>
> And he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning; and sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.
>
> Then the Spirit said unto Philip, "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot."
>
> And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Understandest thou what thou readest?"
>
> And he said, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" And he besought Philip that he would come up and sit with him.
>
> The place of the Scripture from which he read was this:
>
> *He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer is dumb, so opened He not His mouth.*
>
> *In His humiliation, His judgment was taken away, and who shall declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.*
>
> And the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?"
>
> Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.
>
> And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What doth hinder me from being baptized?"

Index

A
Abbey, E., 7, 14
Abortion, 19, 24, 25, 28
Abraham, 105, 114, 141, 167, 168, 209, 210, 223, 239
Absolute, 41, 48, 108, 133, 134, 137, 145–147, 149, 170, 201, 208, 210, 211, 218, 219, 222–224, 226, 227, 229–233
Absolutum, 232
Academy of Athens, 238
Activity/activities, 28, 34, 44, 54, 55, 86, 88, 102, 113, 133, 134, 139, 155, 156, 164, 169, 170, 183, 199, 205–207, 219, 226, 232, 244–246, 249
Actual infinity, 208, 218, 222–224, 228–233
Actus Purissimus, 230
Adam, 18, 99, 114, 126
Adorno, T.W., 80
Aesthetics, 3–14, 17, 37, 48, 50, 52, 91, 95, 99, 103, 140, 172, 173, 175–194, 202, 213, 214, 221
agapê, vi, 131, 133, 134, 161, 227
aisthesis, 5, 9, 31
a*krasia*, 16, 19
Al-Azhar University, 238
aletheia, 108, 235
Alexandria, 60, 92, 148, 199, 233, 238, 255, 264
Alfeyev, H., 158
Allegorical, 16, 37, 84, 110, 122
Alterity, 146, 148, 254, 255
Anagogical, 122
analogia entis, 110, 198, 199
anamnesis/anamnetic, 172
anankē, 94
Angel/angels, 83, 105, 141, 156, 187, 188, 190–194, 265
Angelopoulos, L., 51
Anglican/Anglicanism/Episcopalean/Anglo-Catholic, 50–52, 178
Anthropocentrism, 6, 7, 98
Antinomy/antinomic, ix, x, 209, 217, 218, 225–230
Antioch, 60, 92, 176, 228
apathos/apatheia, 123–125
Apophaticism/apophatic, x, 48, 49, 68, 85, 170, 209
Aquinas, T., 68, 80, 147, 170, 198, 217, 218
Archimedes, 96
Arctic Circle, 196, 215
Arendt, H., 256, 257
aretê, 123
Arian/Ariansim, 59, 63
Aristotle, 8, 9, 16, 19, 31, 34, 37, 61, 80, 95, 108, 130, 132, 136, 138, 145, 170, 217, 226, 238, 240, 265
Asceticism/ascetic, 21, 32–34, 37, 40, 42, 47, 48, 55, 60, 65, 99, 103, 105–116, 119–128, 150, 155–159, 189, 190, 199, 200, 209, 212, 217, 232
askēsis, 80, 82, 174, 201, 218, 221, 223, 224, 226, 227, 232
Astronomy, 35, 111, 240, 250, 255
Atheism, 1, 34, 61, 202, 235, 240
Aufhebung, 220
Augustine, Blessed, 63, 122, 135–137, 148, 186, 224, 243
Aurelius, M., 125
Ayer, A.J., 17

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

B. V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy*, Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture 26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96673-1

B
Bach, J.S., 29
Bacon, F., 241
Bad infinity, 208, 217, 220, 222, 230, 231, 233
Balkans, 67, 92, 200
Balthasar, H.U. Von, 122, 258
Barker, M., 97, 106
Barlaam of Calabria, 66
Barth, K., 258
Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch, 106
Basil, T., ix, x, 148, 155
Batumi, 81
Bavaria, 185
Beauty/the beautiful, v, vi, 3–14, 16–18, 20, 35, 37, 41, 43, 47, 48, 50–52, 59, 61, 63, 64, 73, 75, 77–79, 82, 83, 85, 87–89, 95, 98–100, 102–104, 106, 110, 112, 113, 115, 129, 141, 145, 154, 156, 157, 166, 170, 171, 173, 177, 178, 180, 181, 188, 191, 203, 204, 206, 207, 209, 221, 238, 243, 247, 250, 251, 258
Being, 4, 15, 32, 44, 62, 74, 91, 107, 120, 130, 143, 155, 167, 175, 196, 213, 237, 262
Belinsky, V., 200
Benjamin, W., 195
Berger, P., 177, 257
Bergson, H., viii
Berlin, 201, 216, 240
Berry, W., 6, 94, 114, 257
Black Sea, 81, 122, 195
Blake, W., 99, 107, 212, 237, 241, 245, 246, 253, 256, 257
Blavatsky, H., 84
Bloom, A., 160, 163, 164, 226
Body, 10, 11, 15, 20, 32–34, 56, 60, 61, 77, 79, 85, 113, 121, 173, 180, 187, 213, 239, 240, 253
Böhme, J., 206
Bolsheviks, 140, 202
Brann, E., 88
Breton, A., 225
British Empiricism, 47
British Museum, 83
Buber, M., 46
Bubner, R., 211
Buddhism, 38, 124, 131
Bugaev, N., 216, 220, 221
Bulgakov, S., 68, 69, 77, 83–85, 89, 159, 160, 162, 188, 196, 197, 201, 203–207, 210, 211, 258
Bultmann, R., 50
Burke, E., 5, 12
Burroughs, J., 6, 99
Byrd, R.E., 13
Byzantine, v–x, 1, 7, 39, 51–53, 81, 88, 92, 97, 99, 102, 118, 121, 127, 129–142, 154, 157, 166–174, 181–184, 195, 202–204, 209, 237–239, 246

C
Cairo, 238
Callicott, B., 14
Calvin, J., 147
Calvinism/Calvinist, 45, 186
Cambridge University, 84, 117, 186, 247
Camus, A., 3, 4, 7, 14
Cantor, G., 216, 218, 220, 222, 228–230, 232
Cappadocian, 37, 55, 56, 63, 64, 137, 148, 233, 264
Carlson, A., 6, 10
Carolingian Renaissance, 238
Caspian Sea, 81
Caucasus Mountains, 83, 195, 204, 215
Charles, T., 27
Chinese, 36
chorismos, 197
Christ, 22, 23, 25, 33, 46, 47, 50, 54–56, 70, 74, 75, 83, 97–100, 105, 108–111, 113, 114, 121–123, 125–127, 129, 148, 150, 153, 155, 157, 159–163, 167, 172, 176, 178–181, 187, 190, 192, 198, 203, 209, 228, 264, 265
Christianity/Christian, v, vi, ix, x, 19, 21, 24, 25, 27, 37–39, 43, 47–57, 60, 62, 64, 69, 79, 83, 86, 90–104, 110, 117, 120–122, 125, 131, 132, 135, 143, 151, 153–156, 158, 159, 161–163, 176, 178–180, 182, 185, 186, 190, 197, 199, 200, 205, 208, 212, 217, 225, 226, 228, 230, 232, 233, 238–240, 243, 246, 255, 256, 261, 264
Church Fathers, 43, 88, 233
Cicero, M.T., 243
Claude glass, 11, 12
Clément, O., 156, 158, 161
Climate change, 91, 98
cogito, 138, 198, 210, 220
Coincidentia opositorum, 232
Coleridge, S.T., 6
Coltrane, J., 211
Communion, 15, 20, 21, 54, 56, 129–142, 148–150, 167, 194, 198, 224, 233
Constantinople, viii, ix, 121, 184, 199, 207, 238, 248
contemplatio, 37, 226, 253

Continental Rationalism, 47
Copernicus, N., 111
Council of Frankfurt, 181, 185
Creation, viii, 15, 33, 44, 60, 73, 91, 106, 127, 137, 149, 162, 173, 182, 198, 239, 264
Creator, viii, 1–39, 59–61, 64–66, 68–71, 74, 75, 81, 82, 86, 95, 96, 102, 104, 108–110, 113, 114, 116, 145, 162, 173, 198, 239, 240, 244, 250, 264
Crucifixion, 122
Cyprus, 92
Cyrrhus, 60
Czar Nicholas II, 202

D

Dallas, 50
Darstellung, 88
Darwin, D., 93, 221, 240
das Heilige, 49
das Sein, v, 49
Da Vinci, L., 214
Deification, 122
Deism, 247, 250, 256
Deleuze, G., viii, 138, 173
Demiourgeia, 87
Derrida, J., 29, 109, 132, 133, 138, 186, 211
Descartes, R., 8, 16, 92, 135, 138, 145, 147, 198, 209, 210, 222, 240, 250
Desert Fathers, 65, 97, 113, 115
deus absoconditus, 102
d'Holbach, B., 80
dianoia, 31, 32, 225
Dickens, C., 158
Differance, 138
Dikē (goddess), 15
Dillard, A., 6, 13, 14, 37, 99, 114
Dionysus, D., 9
Discontinuity, 214, 216, 218–225, 228, 230, 231
Divine energies, viii, 54, 55, 64, 68, 84, 90, 100, 102, 110, 113, 156, 157, 169, 170, 177, 181–184, 186, 189–192, 194, 199, 204, 207, 224, 225
Divine essence, 49, 54, 55, 65, 68, 85, 86, 102, 113, 136, 156, 170, 183, 186, 199
Divine glory, 69, 97, 227
Divine Liturgy, vi, 22, 83, 100, 154, 228
Divine love, 82, 126, 129, 133, 134, 140, 209, 224
Divine truth, 105, 189, 222
Divine wisdom/Divine Sophia, 60, 61, 63–66, 68, 69, 73–90, 164, 196, 204, 207, 213, 216
Dogma, 55, 83, 197, 199, 202, 208, 210, 211, 227, 228, 233, 239, 240, 244, 245
Dostoevsky, F., vi, viii, 18, 69, 73–83, 87, 106, 108, 113, 114, 127, 130, 139, 140, 150, 190, 200–204, 211, 212, 257, 258
doxa, 52, 87, 171
Dreher, R., 256
Duchamp, M., 225
Dürer, A., 11, 167
Dyad, 56, 144, 226

E

Earth, vii, viii, 4, 7, 17, 19, 20, 23, 32, 39, 60, 61, 70, 71, 74, 76, 81, 88, 89, 91, 96, 97, 99–101, 103, 105–107, 111, 115, 120–123, 127, 128, 133, 139–141, 147, 162, 172, 177–179, 181, 183, 184, 186, 192, 196, 207, 209, 214, 215, 221, 224, 228, 235, 236, 265
ecstasis, 9, 76, 82, 132, 137, 180, 187, 203, 208, 209, 230
Eden, 74, 81, 204
Egorov, D., 216
Ehrenfeld, D., 7
e*idos*, 16, 171
eikasia, 88, 171, 253
e*ikon*, 16, 88, 89, 100, 125, 137, 165, 168, 171, 173
ekklesia, 209, 226
Elder Aimilianos, 37
Elder Ephraim, 59
Elder Joseph the Hesychast, 22, 113
Elder Zosima, 18, 25, 73–76, 82, 85, 87, 114, 203
Elijah, 105, 114, 125
Eliot, T.S., 258
Ellul, J., 186, 257
Emanation, 85, 144, 243
Emerson, R.W., 6, 37, 78, 99
energeia/energeiai, 54, 55, 86, 102, 113, 156, 169, 170, 184, 199, 203
Energy, viii, 14, 50, 54–56, 64, 84, 86, 88–90, 100, 102, 106, 110, 113, 116, 156, 157, 169, 170, 174, 177, 178, 181–192, 194, 199, 204, 207, 225, 245, 251, 252
Engelhardt, H.T., 17, 28, 51, 52
Enlightenment, ix, 16, 32, 38, 42, 67, 80, 100, 200–202, 237, 240, 243, 245, 250, 254, 256
Environment, vi, 3–14, 34, 37–40, 49, 56, 57, 74, 76, 88, 89, 91–116, 135, 224
Epictetus, S., 125
Epicurus, E., 42, 61

Epistemology, 16, 20, 21, 40, 103, 105–116, 122, 143, 169, 171, 173, 187, 197, 198, 201, 202, 205, 209, 220, 226, 239, 241, 242, 244, 249, 250, 253, 254
epithymia, 124, 173
ergon, 86
Eriugena, J.S., 122, 206
eros, 86, 130, 131, 133, 136, 159, 161, 162, 170, 171, 173, 174, 258
Erscheinung, 205
Essence, x, 8, 9, 49, 54–56, 65, 68, 82, 85, 86, 101, 102, 112, 113, 130, 132, 136, 137, 149, 154, 156, 169, 170, 183–187, 199, 200, 209, 238, 253
Ethics, 1, 4, 14, 16, 27–29, 37, 79, 80, 124, 125, 131, 138, 146, 198, 214, 221, 254
Euclid, 20, 21, 96
Euripides, 208
Euthanasia, 19, 24, 25, 28
Evagrius of Pontus, 153

F
Face, 32, 38, 46, 47, 49, 54, 56, 66, 74, 77, 78, 88, 93, 100, 103, 106, 115, 117, 124, 128, 129, 133, 136, 137, 146, 158, 168–170, 173, 187, 190–194, 201, 205
Faith, viii, x, 7, 19, 20, 25, 31–39, 46–48, 50, 53–55, 62, 66, 68, 74, 79, 104, 117, 122, 132, 145, 158, 163, 177, 179, 189, 192, 194, 198, 199, 210, 223, 227, 230, 239, 244
Fall/fallenness, 79, 83, 97, 98, 112, 126, 127, 143, 157, 164, 181, 182, 184, 190, 200, 222, 249
Feuerbach, L., viii, 7, 201, 202, 210, 226, 254
Fez, 238
Fichte, J.G./Fichtean, 135, 138, 145, 195–212
Final cause, 34, 221
Florensky, P., vi, 44, 45, 56, 69, 75, 77, 79–83, 85–87, 89, 108, 133, 134, 136, 139, 141, 145, 165, 168, 171–173, 187, 195–212
Florida, 5, 6, 50, 52
Florovsky, G., 55, 66–69, 84, 97, 135–233, 243
Foltz, B.V., v–vi, 88, 89, 93
Forgiveness, 18, 117, 119–128, 158
Fourth Crusade, vii
Frankfurt School, 242
Frank, M., 201, 211
Franks, 182, 184
Freedom, 68, 76, 78, 96, 125, 137–139, 149, 198, 210, 221, 248
Freud/Sigmund/Freudian/Freudianism, 98, 198, 240
fundamentum inconcussum, 198

G
Gadamer, H.G., 263
Galileo, G., 36
Garden of Gethsemane, 223
Gauchet, M., 237
Gegenstand, 205
Georgia (Republic of), 99, 195, 215
German idealism, 195–212, 225, 226, 230
Germany, 107, 200, 211, 240, 252, 263
Gibbon, E., ix
Glory, 18, 20, 23, 25, 41, 52, 54, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 82, 87, 91, 95–97, 99, 100, 103, 104, 107, 111, 113, 114, 116, 125, 162, 163, 171, 181, 227, 228, 239
Gnostic/Gnosticism, 36, 63, 83–85, 92, 98
God, 13, 15, 33, 41, 59, 74, 91, 105, 119, 129, 144, 153, 169, 176, 198, 217, 238
God-man, viii, 74, 108
Goethe, J.W. von, 46, 99, 241
Gogol, N., 200–202
Golding, W., 144
Gothic, viii, 172
Grace, viii, ix, 4, 32–34, 46, 53, 55, 56, 60, 62, 64, 67, 70, 76–79, 96, 97, 111, 119, 120, 122, 123, 126, 128, 134, 141, 150, 157, 159–162, 181, 184, 188, 198, 227, 230, 233
gratia dei, 53
Great Books, 261–265
Great Lent, 154, 155, 180
Greece, 53, 92, 96, 97, 136, 150, 160, 173, 185, 200, 204, 237–239, 247, 257
Greek East, 137, 148, 170, 171, 199
Greeks, viii, ix, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 17, 22, 31, 32, 34, 37, 42, 49, 54–56, 79, 80, 86–88, 94–96, 108, 109, 113, 122, 131, 134–137, 148, 150, 155, 161, 168, 170, 171, 173, 176, 180, 186, 191, 199, 206, 208, 225, 226, 229, 230, 233, 235, 240, 247, 253
Guardian Angel, 83, 187, 191, 192
Gulag, 77, 171, 172, 196, 215, 225

H
Habermas, J., 29, 198
Hagia Sophia, viii
Haiku, 213
haireisthai, 180

Hart, D.B., 95
Heart, viii–x, 6, 13, 15, 26, 33, 46, 48, 50, 53–55, 68, 71, 74, 75, 79, 80, 82, 86, 99, 101, 103–105, 111–114, 121–127, 141, 150, 153–164, 188, 189, 199, 203, 204, 211, 214, 222, 223, 227, 239, 252, 254
Heaven/heavens, vii, viii, 4, 5, 11, 12, 20, 22, 35, 39, 40, 60, 61, 64, 70, 74, 76–78, 81, 82, 88, 89, 91, 97, 100, 111, 120–123, 127, 133, 139–141, 147, 172, 173, 176–179, 181, 183, 186, 187, 192, 196, 201, 207, 214, 215, 224, 228, 235, 240, 247
Hebron, 168
Hegel, G.W.F., 5, 145, 198, 200–202, 204, 208, 210, 217, 218, 220, 242, 254, 256, 257, 262, 263
Hegelian Left, 210
Heidegger, M./Heideggerean, v, vi, 6–9, 13, 14, 17, 35, 44, 46, 49, 50, 89, 107–109, 114, 131, 173, 205, 214, 222, 235, 249, 250, 255, 257, 263
Heilsgeschichte, 44
Heliocentricism, 111
hen panta, 213
Henrich, D., 211
Heraclitus, 42, 76, 143, 144, 180, 197, 213–215, 217, 233, 265
heresia, 180
Hermogenes, 63
Herzen, A., 200
Hesiod, 96
Hesychasm, 150, 161, 201
hesychia, 150, 161, 195
hexis, 138
Hindu/Hinduism, 48, 157, 209, 228, 232
Hobbes, T., 21
Hölderlin, F., 6, 49, 78, 107, 113, 120, 200, 204, 211, 212, 255
Holocaust, 7, 19
Holy Scripture, 33, 100, 110, 190
Holy Spirit, 33, 36, 54, 64, 100, 137, 148, 149, 154, 155, 159, 160, 162, 254
Hopkins, G.M., 78, 102
Horkheimer, M., 80, 242
Hossios Loukas Monastsery, 185
Households, 77, 178, 205
Humanism, 3–14, 68, 134, 147, 202, 210
Humanitas, 7, 8, 13
Humanities, 241, 242, 244–247
Humanity, viii, 7, 9, 14, 15, 23, 24, 38, 63, 74, 92, 94, 97–99, 102, 103, 107, 108, 110, 121, 122, 127, 128, 131, 139, 147, 162, 168, 172, 173, 178, 200, 205–207, 216, 233, 238, 259
Human life, 1, 15–26, 93
Human nature, 28, 60, 69, 74, 79–81, 107, 108, 112, 114, 123, 126–128, 135, 138, 176, 243
Hume, D., 79
Husserl, E., 101, 109, 243, 252, 253
Hypokeimenon, 8
hypostasis, 33, 84, 136, 137, 148
hypostatic, 68, 85, 138, 170, 264

I

Icon/iconic, vii, 15–26, 46, 51, 52, 64, 88–90, 100, 116, 120–122, 125, 140, 141, 155, 157, 165, 167–174, 180–187, 191–194
Iconoclasm, 181–187
Identity, 115, 134, 135, 137, 138, 145–148, 151, 176, 201, 205, 206, 208, 211, 212, 217–220, 223–227, 229–233, 249, 251, 255
Idol/idolatry, 84, 85, 102, 115–174, 182, 183, 185, 186, 188, 189, 246, 249
Image, 11–13, 16, 20, 22–26, 59, 63, 64, 77, 82, 88, 89, 92, 100, 101, 104, 122, 129, 137, 156, 165, 168–171, 173, 174, 180–186, 188–190, 208, 211, 223, 225, 238, 253, 264
Imagination, vi, 12, 56, 88, 99, 156, 171, 185, 189, 237, 241, 250–254
Immanence, viii, 39, 78, 102, 185, 197, 199, 203, 207, 210, 213, 214, 237–241, 246, 253, 257, 259
Incarnation, 62, 64, 103, 126, 148, 177–180, 183, 184, 196, 205, 216, 264
Infinity, vi, 86, 146, 208, 215, 217, 218, 220–224, 228–233
Intellect, vi, ix, 1, 7, 31–33, 42, 47, 49, 53, 74, 75, 84, 94, 96, 102, 108, 114, 122, 126, 127, 131, 135, 136, 143, 144, 146, 148, 156, 170, 186, 195, 197–204, 208–210, 212, 214, 223, 225, 226, 238, 239, 246–250, 252, 256, 262, 263
Intelligent design, 240
Ipseity, 145, 146, 203
Islam/Islamic, 36, 149, 183, 237–239, 243, 246
istina, 108, 109

J

James, W. (Jamesian), 11, 19, 41, 45, 52–55, 201, 208

Jankélévitch, V., 119, 120, 122, 125–127
Japanese, 48, 213
Jason, 81
Jerusalem, 79, 82, 96, 105, 117, 189, 197, 199, 265
Jesus Prayer, 153–155, 158, 159
John Paul II, 19–21, 23
Judaism, 97, 239
Justice, 16, 85, 241, 247, 263

K
Kafka, F., 150
kallos/kalos, 79, 170
Kansas, 45, 47
Kant, I., 5, 12, 13, 21, 28, 42, 46, 82, 146, 172, 196–198, 203, 205, 206, 210, 216, 221, 225, 226, 253, 254
katanyxis, 158, 159
Kataphatic, 89, 170
katharsis, 37, 55, 74, 113, 199
kenosis/kenotic, 48, 134, 139, 140, 149, 151, 170, 180, 208, 209, 230, 232
KGB, 171
Kierkegaard, S., viii, 17, 26, 42, 46, 145, 146, 149, 201, 210, 214, 220, 256
Kingdom of God, 18, 25, 83, 149, 160
Kireyevsky, I., 200–202, 211
Kitsch, 177–179, 182, 185, 188
Klein, J., 16, 56, 88, 263
Knowledge, 5, 16, 31, 40, 44, 69, 82, 95, 105, 122, 129, 143, 161, 168, 190, 198, 217, 239
Kontakion, 180, 181
kosmos, 6, 63, 144, 175
Krishnamurti, J., 157
Krutch, J.W., 7
ktisis, 39, 87, 89, 90, 94
Kyiv, 192, 207

L
Late antiquity, 61, 170, 197, 200, 243, 247, 255
Latin, v, viii, 8, 32, 37, 53, 55, 76, 94, 95, 110, 122, 131, 135, 136, 138, 146, 148, 157, 170, 180–182, 184–186, 189, 218, 237–240, 243, 250, 253
Latin Church, 53, 185
Latin West, viii, 122, 170, 182, 184–186, 240, 243, 250
Law, 21–23, 25, 69, 78, 80, 94, 101, 123, 133, 143, 145, 205, 217–220, 223, 225, 226, 230–232, 241, 245, 247
Lawrence, D.H., 225
Lazarus, 125
Lebenswelt, 89, 101, 253
Leibniz, G.W. Von, 132, 145, 171
L'Engle, M., 50
Levinas, E., 146, 149, 173, 203, 257
Lewis, C.S., 22, 50, 131, 133
Libri Carolini, 181–183, 188
Lichtung, 235
Life, 17, 31, 42, 60, 74, 91, 105, 119, 131, 143, 154, 173, 175, 195, 213, 238, 265
Light, vii, viii, ix, 4, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 19, 21, 25, 32, 34, 37, 41, 44, 54–56, 71, 73, 80, 82, 84, 92, 95, 160, 162, 176, 180, 185, 187, 190, 192, 197, 198, 204, 207, 223, 227, 228, 249, 255–257, 262
Likeness, 15, 26, 59, 104, 242
Locke, J., 241, 256
Logic/logical, x, 1, 48, 56, 66, 84, 135, 145, 170, 200, 208, 213–233, 249, 255
logismos, 9, 31
logos/logos/logoi, viii, 8, 33, 42, 55, 61, 64, 86–88, 90, 101, 113, 114, 125–128, 168, 173, 180, 181, 183, 186, 197, 199, 203, 204, 206, 239, 262, 264
logos spermatikos, 206
London, 32, 51, 52, 75, 82, 97, 106, 122, 156–161, 163
Longinus, 12
Lopez, B., 13, 14, 99
Lord's prayer, 86, 119–128
Lossky, V., ix, 53, 66, 67, 69, 78, 85, 96, 101, 149, 264
Lot, 105, 114
Louth, A., 77, 88, 89, 181
Love, 5, 17, 34, 41, 71, 97, 111, 121, 129, 143, 154, 170, 188, 198, 217, 243
Luther, M., 147, 198
Luzin, N., 216
Lyotard, J.-F., 262

M
Macdonald, G., 50
MacIntyre, A., 256
Macquarrie, J., 50
makarios, 32, 75, 122, 157, 159, 161
Manichees, 63
Marcuse, H., 242
Marion, J.-L., 122, 132, 169, 174, 185, 186, 249, 257
Marxism/Marxists, 204, 205, 242
Marx, K., viii, 7, 201, 202, 205, 207, 210, 221, 226, 240, 254

Materialism/materialism, 98, 202, 204, 205, 210
Mathematics/mathematical, vi, 9, 11, 12, 47, 89, 99, 102, 103, 107, 109–111, 165, 196, 209, 213–233, 244, 255
McHugh, Bishop J.T., 18, 19, 23
Medea, 81
Melville, H., 10, 213
Merleau-Ponty, M., 89
metanoia/metanoietic, 22, 74, 158, 159, 203
Metaphysics, 6, 8, 9, 13, 16, 40, 49, 56, 69, 76, 77, 89, 93, 103, 171, 183, 184, 198, 201, 213–233, 249, 255
metaxu, 68, 77, 84, 89
Meteora, 184
methexis, 197, 253
Middle Academy, 42
Middle Ages, 16, 53, 76, 95, 110, 146, 226, 237, 242, 243
Middle East, 67, 92, 200
Milbank, J., 84, 90
Milton, J., 12
mimesis, 181
Mind, vi, 6, 10, 12, 13, 23, 34, 37, 41, 47, 53, 65, 86, 122, 130, 145, 156–158, 161, 162, 171, 172, 182, 189, 192, 205, 226, 237, 241, 248, 252, 261
Mingus, C., 211
Momaday, S., 6
Monad/monadism, 145, 149, 220, 224, 225
Monothelite, 122
Moore, G.E., 79
Moscow, 27, 141, 168, 191, 195, 201, 220
Moses, 54, 100, 191
Mothersill, M., 14
Mozart, W.A., 29
Mt. Ararat, 81
Mt. Athos/Athonite, 65, 81, 104, 150, 154, 158, 184
Mt. Ktahdin, 14
Mt. Olympus, 81
Mt. Sinai, 54, 65, 84
Muir, J., 6, 14, 37, 78, 99, 107, 114
Munich, 201
Mystery, 8, 9, 20–22, 24–26, 37, 41–57, 75, 76, 81–83, 85, 86, 100–102, 113, 122, 123, 125, 141, 146, 156, 158, 168, 172, 176, 203, 206, 209, 226–230, 239, 244, 245, 249, 254, 255
Mystic/mystical/mysticism, v, ix, x, 34, 36, 37, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47, 48, 53–55, 65, 66, 78, 83, 96, 100, 101, 113, 122, 125, 126, 128, 143, 147, 156, 157, 163, 170, 184, 197, 200, 202, 204, 206, 209, 218, 221, 224, 225, 229, 230, 238, 246, 253, 256

N
Nansen, F., 13
Nasr, S.H., 36, 258
natura, 94, 206
Natural attitude, 92, 103, 243
Naturalism, 68, 78, 79, 192, 235, 242, 250
natura naturans, 206
Nature, 3, 16, 27, 32, 43, 59, 73, 91, 106, 122, 135, 150, 168, 175, 195, 215, 242
Neo-Darwinism/neo-Darwinian, 93
Neo-Platonism, 37, 85, 92, 133, 144, 145
nepsis, 158
neti/neti, 209
New Age, 36, 38, 44
Newman, J.H.C, 239, 247–250
New Mexico, 51
New Testament, 53–55, 87, 119, 134, 175, 264
Newton/Isaac/Newtonian, 32–36, 38, 79, 102, 109, 240, 241, 244, 250
Nicea/nicene council, 135, 179–182, 185, 208, 233
Nicholson, M.H., 12
Nietzsche/friedrich/nietzschean, vi, viii, 7, 9, 28, 29, 42, 49, 56, 77, 91, 108, 131, 132, 139, 145, 147, 158, 172, 208, 211, 214, 244, 249
Nihilism, viii, 48, 77, 147, 235, 247
Nihilists, viii, 74, 202, 203, 262
Nisbet, R., 239
Noah, 105, 111, 114
Noetic, 1, 32–34, 37, 53, 64, 83, 87–89, 99, 113, 125, 130, 147, 188, 199, 201, 209, 212, 226–228
nomos/nomoi, 108, 205
noumenon/noumena/noumenal, 82, 140, 172, 196, 198, 204, 210, 215–216
nous/noesis, 16, 31, 33, 55, 85, 113, 114, 122, 126, 127, 130, 143, 144, 157, 158, 225, 226, 238
Novgorod, 191, 207

O
Oak of Mamre, 105, 167
objectum, 179, 180
Occult, 9, 83–85
Old Believer, 89, 191–194
Old Testament, 54, 63, 65, 77, 79, 84, 87, 103, 136, 207, 264
Ontology, 50, 56, 64, 69, 127, 129–142, 174, 183, 216, 218, 233
ontōs on, 108
Optina Elders, 160, 163
Optina Pustyn Monastery, 73, 201, 203
Origen, 63, 69, 148

Orthodox/Orthodoxy/Orthodox Church, 22, 32, 41, 59, 73, 91, 108, 119, 133, 149, 153, 172, 175, 200, 214, 257
Osiris, 83
Ottobeuren Basilica, 185
ousia, 54, 86, 102, 112, 136, 137, 156, 169, 170, 184, 187, 199, 233
Oxford University, 12, 13, 67, 84, 177, 240, 242

P
Paradise, 18, 81, 82, 105, 127, 157, 195, 203, 204, 207
Parmenides, 15, 31, 42, 143, 144, 197, 213, 215, 217, 223, 226, 233, 238, 247, 257
Pascal, Blaise, 171
Pascha, 108, 162
pathē, 124, 131, 159
Patriarch, 106, 112, 183
Patristic, 31, 32, 35, 36, 54, 56, 62, 63, 65–67, 69, 97, 98, 110, 112, 113, 122, 136, 148, 157, 162, 173, 186, 225, 226, 230, 233
Pentecost, 111
penthos, 158
perichoresis, 172
Persephone, 84
Person, 4, 16, 32, 43, 60, 83, 98, 107, 119, 130, 148, 155, 168, 176, 195, 218, 246
Perspectivism, ix, 14, 19, 24, 27, 93, 118, 157, 167, 168, 174, 175, 201, 217, 244, 262
phantasia/phantasmata, 88, 253
Phenomenology/phenomenological, 48, 89, 101, 131, 154, 173, 208, 253, 257
Phenomenon/phenomena/phenomenal, 44, 82, 172, 173, 177, 196, 216, 242, 257
Philadelphia, 50, 88, 182
Philokalia, 32, 33, 51, 75, 77, 112, 114, 122, 126, 153, 157, 159, 161, 162, 189
Philosophical theology, 54, 89, 117, 147, 233
Philosophy/philosopher/philosophical, 5, 21, 27, 31, 42, 62, 82, 96, 125, 130, 143, 169, 196, 213, 238
phronesis, 31
physikoi, 62, 94, 168
physis, 12, 60, 61, 80, 94, 96, 108, 127, 137, 138, 239
plani, 42
Plato, vi, 8, 9, 11, 16, 31, 42, 56, 80, 88, 117, 130, 132, 133, 138, 143, 144, 146, 147, 165, 168, 170, 171, 173, 175, 201, 206, 226, 238, 240, 247, 253, 255, 257, 262, 263, 265
Platytera, 125
Plotinus, 31, 42, 85, 144, 148, 206, 226, 230
Poetry/poetic, 63, 79, 83, 88, 96, 97, 99, 104, 113, 166, 174, 195, 207, 208, 212, 214, 246, 258
Polkinghorne, J., 258
Pollution, 91
Population, 91, 95
Post-modern/post-modernism, ix, 50, 107, 108, 138, 169, 173, 175, 197, 211, 221, 241, 244–246, 255, 257, 262
praxis, vi, 21, 22, 33, 37, 38, 48, 49, 226
Prayer, 20, 33, 47, 60, 96, 115, 119, 136, 149, 153, 169, 178, 195, 240
Prayer-corners, 155, 183, 187
prelest, 42, 83, 157
Presbyterian, 45
Probabilism, 223
Prometheus/promethean, 110, 114
prosôpon, 54, 77, 88, 135–137, 170, 186, 187
protē ousia, 76
Protestant/protestanism, 47, 48, 76, 147, 176, 200, 206, 256, 258
Providence, 34, 60–69, 94, 95, 97, 183, 192, 194
Psalms/psalmist, 20, 22, 39, 55, 59, 62, 63, 88, 89, 95–97, 103, 107, 110, 111, 114, 115, 154, 155
Psychology, 36, 98, 127, 133, 148, 220, 221, 258
Ptolomy/ptolomaic, 35, 36
Purification, 3, 9, 22, 37, 55, 74, 76, 80, 82, 103, 113, 125, 199, 209
Pyramids of Giza, 83

Q
Qarawiyin University, 232
Quantum mechanics, 221

R
Rahner, K., 50
Raskolnikov, 74, 113, 127, 128, 139
Ratio, 8, 11, 13, 32, 229
Rationality, ix, 8, 9, 13, 21, 24, 32, 41, 42, 55, 69, 99, 101, 103, 138, 145, 146, 200–203, 209, 218, 219, 222, 223, 225–230, 232, 233, 262
Rawls, J., 21
reductio ad absurdum, 28, 173, 249
Reductionism/reductionistic, viii, 13, 62, 93, 101, 242, 254, 257, 262
Reformation, 76, 176, 182

Religion, 9, 28, 42, 48, 50, 54, 61, 78, 92, 95, 146, 177, 178, 207, 221, 227, 232, 237, 238, 244, 249, 253–255
Renaissance, 7, 11, 84, 167, 178, 238, 240, 243, 253, 262
Repentance, 74, 82, 121, 158, 159, 212
Resurrection, 17, 48, 61, 62, 89, 109, 111, 122, 148, 162, 222
Rilke, R.M., 17, 168, 169, 172, 258
Road to Emmaus, 264
Roman Catholic, 132, 178, 188, 189, 258, 262
Romania, 53, 257
Romanides, J., 36, 66, 179
Romanticism, 6, 99, 177
Rome/Roman, v, 8, 95, 96, 112, 143, 160, 183, 185, 246
Rorty, R., 169, 247
Russell, B., 7
Russia/Russian, vi, ix, 27, 39, 42, 44, 53, 67–70, 73–75, 77, 78, 84, 88–90, 92, 97, 108, 109, 133, 140, 141, 149, 153–155, 157, 162, 165, 167, 171, 172, 186, 187, 190–213, 215, 216, 225, 243, 257
Russian School of Mathematics, 216–217
Russian Symbolism, 84, 213

S

Sacrament/sacramental/sacramentalism, 20, 45, 55, 91, 100, 101, 157, 164, 264
Sade, M. de, 28, 80
Sahara Desert, 83
Sallis, J., 88
Salvation, 42, 44, 56, 94, 97, 106, 114, 125, 180, 227, 244
Sartre, J.-P., 7, 44, 135, 138
Scheler, M., 79, 89, 131, 132
Schelling F.W.J., 200, 201, 204–208, 210, 212, 241
Scholasticism, 55, 117, 135, 146–148, 218, 250
Science/scientific, 8, 27, 31, 66, 78, 91, 105, 147, 169, 196, 213, 237
Scotus, J.D., 206, 250
Scruton, R., 177, 178
Sea of Galilee, 78, 199
Searle, J., 244
Second Vatican Council, 185
Secularism, 27–29, 187
Seeing, 1, 15–17, 20–23, 25, 32, 33, 36, 55, 56, 60–62, 65, 76, 82, 88, 91, 95, 101, 105, 107, 110, 113, 158, 171, 178, 182, 189, 193, 199, 204, 211, 242, 253, 257
Self-identity, 137, 145, 148, 218–220, 223–227, 229, 230, 232, 233
Septuagint Old Testament, 87, 136
Shestov, L., 225
simulacrum, 170, 173
Singer, P., 24, 28, 29
Sirach, Book of, 23
Skepticism, 1, 44, 223, 244, 248, 255
Slavophile, 196, 200, 202, 204, 212, 225
Snyder, G., 6
Socrates, 4, 14, 22, 42, 43, 168, 176, 219, 226
Solovetsky Monastery, 196, 215
Solovyov, V., 69, 73, 75, 77, 83, 84, 201, 206
Sophia, 31, 39, 59–71, 73–90, 128, 140, 196, 203, 204, 207, 213, 216
Sophiology/sophianic, 68, 73–84, 88–90, 207, 209
Space, viii, 35, 54, 78, 81, 89, 106, 146, 176, 178, 184, 186, 240
Spinoza, B., 42, 144, 224
St. Athanasius, 59, 63
St. Basil the Great, 55, 135, 136, 148, 154, 181
St. Clement of Alexandria, 63, 76, 87
St. Dionysius of Zakynthos, 121
St. Dionysius the Areopagite, 64, 162, 170, 171
sterêsis, 144, 145
Stethatos, N., 112
St. Francis of Assisi, 151
St. Gregory of Nazianzus, 135, 148
St. Gregory of Nyssa, ix, 57, 59, 86, 135, 148, 162, 206
St. Gregory Palamas, 43, 55, 56, 64, 66, 159, 186
St. Heychius, 161
St. Ignatii Brianchaninov, 160, 163, 189
St. Isaac of Syria, 15, 26, 33, 91
St. Isaac the Syrian, 32, 129, 150, 160
St. James the Apostle, 54
St. John Chrysostom, 22, 60, 63, 158
St. John Maximovitch, 68
St. John of Damascus, 15, 181, 183
St. John's College, 263
St. John the Apostle, 54, 264
St. Justin Martyr, 63
St. Maximus the Confessor, 32, 33, 87, 119–129, 206, 264
St. Mark the Ascetic, 32
St. Nathaniel, 105, 114
St. Nikolai Velomirovich, 111
St. Nils Sorsky, 157
Stoic/Stoicism, 80, 124, 125, 144, 206, 239, 265

St. Paisios, 37
St. Patrick, 24
St. Paul, 16, 64, 98, 100, 112, 137, 153, 160
St. Peter the Apostle, 54
St. Philip, 32, 75, 122, 157, 159, 161, 265
St. Porphyrios, 37, 96, 160–162
Structuralism/structuralist, 7
St. Seraphim of Sarov, 96
St. Symeon the Stylite, 52, 60
St. Theophan the Recluse, 215
studia humanitatis, 243
St. Vincent of Lérins, 65
Suarez, F., 218, 219
Subjectum, 8, 138
Substance, 54, 64, 76, 95, 103, 113, 136, 137, 169–171, 173, 187, 197, 198, 233
substantia, 186
Symbol/symbolic, vi, x, 44, 50, 55, 64, 82, 120, 133, 135, 165, 173, 196, 202, 216
Syria, 53, 60

T

Techne/techni, 31, 99, 140, 158, 167, 170, 178, 241, 245, 246, 252
Technology, 8, 91, 107, 109, 114, 115, 241, 242, 245, 257, 258
telos/teloi, 34, 42, 43
Tertullian, 63
Thessaly, 184
Thebaid, 65, 78
The Created, 64, 65, 88, 98, 100, 102, 104, 169
The Empyrean, 196, 198, 209, 215
The Good, 6, 16, 88, 100, 103, 106, 144, 147, 171, 203, 238, 255
The Holy, 1, 6, 8, 13, 20–22, 24, 32, 33, 36, 49, 54, 56, 59, 62, 64, 71, 73, 75, 79, 88, 95, 99, 100, 105, 111, 119, 122, 137, 141, 149, 151, 154, 155, 157, 159–163, 167, 168, 170, 172, 178, 179, 181, 183, 190–192, 194, 208, 212, 228, 254, 255, 257
The Invisible, vii, 22, 33, 39, 60, 64, 75, 77, 78, 84, 86, 100, 102, 103, 117, 133, 157, 165, 168, 169, 171, 172, 176–178, 187, 188, 196, 216, 237, 249, 253, 254
Theism, 29, 56, 255
Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Blessed, 60–66, 69, 70
Theodulf, 182, 183, 186, 188
Theology, 20, 27, 41, 60, 78, 95, 108, 122, 135, 146, 153, 167, 179, 196, 214, 237, 261
theōria, 22, 31, 37, 55, 113, 199, 226, 253
theōria physikē, 33, 37, 55, 99, 103, 113, 199
Theory, 4, 31, 35, 49, 62, 80, 97, 99, 101, 103, 107, 198, 207, 216, 220, 226, 229, 245, 253, 257
Theos, 239
theosis, viii, 34, 36, 56, 122, 209
Theosophy, 84
The Other, 129, 131–134, 138, 140, 143–146, 149–151, 173, 176, 189, 190, 210, 217, 229, 233
Theotokos, 121, 125, 154
The Sacred, 178, 186, 188, 200, 235, 238, 240, 244, 245, 250, 254, 256, 258
The Same, 7, 15, 37, 42, 88, 94, 109, 119, 130, 143, 154, 167, 178, 198, 214, 237
The Soul, vi, ix, 9, 11, 32, 33, 36–38, 43, 55, 75, 76, 85, 99, 103, 104, 112, 120, 124–126, 129, 130, 134, 140, 155, 160, 163, 188, 189, 199, 220, 222, 224, 225, 227
The Sublime, 1, 6, 12–14
The uncreated, 54, 77, 165, 212
The Visible, vii, 1, 17, 22, 33, 36, 39, 60, 75, 78, 84, 85, 88, 92, 100, 118, 120, 124, 133, 155, 157, 162, 165, 168, 169, 171–173, 176–178, 181, 188, 196, 198, 216, 226, 237, 249, 250, 253, 254
The Word, 26, 61, 86, 89, 136, 149, 151, 156, 163, 174, 194, 197
Thoreau, H.D., 6, 9, 14, 37, 78, 99, 107, 114
Tibetan Buddhism, 48
Tillich, P., 50
tô einai, 49, 143
Tolkien, J.R.R., 50, 98
Tolstoy, L., 190, 201, 202
Totality, ix, x, 34, 60, 69, 98, 102, 144, 146, 149, 174, 203, 210, 222, 229, 233, 262
Traherne, T., 37, 78, 115
Transcendence, viii, 1, 45, 56, 75, 99, 102, 112, 185, 197, 199, 203, 207, 210, 211, 213, 214, 235, 237–250, 253–259
Transcendentals, 44, 101, 110, 197, 198, 201, 204–207, 210, 217, 224, 229, 237, 250, 253
Transfiguration, viii, 32, 54, 74, 178
Transhumanism, 69
Tretyakov Museum, 141, 168
Trinity, 24, 54, 56, 84, 105, 135–137, 139–142, 148, 149, 151, 155, 159, 160, 163, 167, 168, 170, 187, 208, 209, 217, 222, 230, 233
Trinity-St Sergius Monastery, 168

Triumph of Orthodoxy, 180, 184
Tropological, 122
True cross, 105
Truth, v, 15, 32, 41, 60, 74, 92, 105, 123, 133, 143, 165, 173, 176, 196, 213, 238, 262
Tuan, Y.-F., 13
Tübingen, 200, 204
Tübingen Stift, 211
Turgenev, I., 202
Turkey, 81
Twain, M., 6
Typological, 53, 122, 125

U
Übermensch, 108, 132, 145
Umwelt, 93
Uncreated light, vii, 95
University, vi, 12, 19, 27, 44, 67, 73, 93, 117, 120, 133, 155, 177, 195, 214, 237, 261
University of Berlin, 240
University of Bologna, 238
University of Constantinople, 238
University of Paris, 238
Unmoved Mover, 238

V
Value, 7, 11, 19, 20, 25, 36, 37, 46, 74, 77–80, 83, 101, 114, 134, 145, 221, 240, 243, 263
Varlaam Monastery, 185
Vasileios (Gontakis) of Iveron, 150
Vattimo, G., 29, 211
Vedanta, 48
Vespers, 51, 120, 154, 162
via negativa, 242
Virgil, 96, 265
Virgin Birth, 122
Virgin Mary, 163
Vlachos, H., 36, 136
Von Uexküll, J., 93
Vorstellung, 88, 201

W
Ware, K., 32, 75, 122, 157, 159, 161, 228
Weber, M., 27, 49
Wedding at Cana, 163
West/Westernv, vii, 3, 16, 27, 31, 42, 67, 74, 92, 108, 119, 131, 143, 158, 167, 175, 198, 225, 240, 262
Whitehead, A.N., 237, 247, 250–254, 257
Wieskirche, 185
William of Ockham, 96, 147, 250
Williams, W.C., 78, 79
Wilson, E.O., 115
Wisdom, 17, 34, 43, 59, 61, 63–66, 68, 69, 71, 73–90, 94, 96, 104, 112, 113, 128, 140, 164, 175, 180, 193, 196, 201, 213, 215, 216, 248, 251
Wisdom Books, 63, 65, 79, 84, 89, 96, 103, 110, 207
Wittgenstein, L. (Wittgensteinian), x, 169
Wordsworth, W., 37, 78
World, v, vii, 3, 15, 27, 31, 43, 59, 74, 91, 112, 124, 133, 144, 155, 171, 175, 196, 213, 237, 261

Y
Yannaras, C., 86, 136, 171, 173, 174, 186, 264
Yeats, W.B., vii

Z
Zacchaeus, 105, 114
Zen Buddhism, v, 48, 228
Zeno of Elea, 229
Ziff, P., 6
Žižek, S., 29, 211
Zizioulas, J., 56, 136, 137, 149
Zosima, S., 140